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RALPH ROY, The Boy Buccaneer; Or, THE FUGITIVE YACHT.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE FLYING YANKEE," ETC.



THE BEAUTIFUL PILOT OF HURL-GATE.

Ralph Roy,

THE BOY BUCCANEER;

OR,

THE FUGITIVE YACHT.

A Romance of Sea and Shore.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE FLYING YANKEE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASKED DUEL.

"PAUL PRESBURY, *you are a liar!*"

The words rung out, clear and determined, from the lips of a youth apparently twenty years of age, judging from his manly form, and handsome, fearless face; but in reality, Ralph Roy was only eighteen.

The youth to whom he addressed the stinging words, was Paul Presbury, two years the senior of his insulter, and of about the same size and build.

The two were students at Classical College, and from the first had been bitter rivals in everything—their natures being wholly antagonistic toward each other.

For a long time they had not spoken to each other; but this day, on the campus, Paul Presbury had remarked, in the hearing of his rival, that Ralph Roy had been guilty of a raid upon the rooms of the professors, the night before, and was going to allow an innocent boy to be expelled for the offense he himself had committed.

"Paul Presbury, *you are a liar!*"

Instantly a silence like death fell upon all, and the students present—a score in number—held their breath in expectancy; what would follow this bold charge of Ralph Roy?

Paul Presbury turned as pale as death, and stood for an instant like a marble statue.

Then, a cry of rage on his lips, he sprung forward and aimed a blow at the head of his insulter, with the words:

"Take that, sir!"

But Ralph Roy did not take *that*; he skillfully warded the blow, and leaping backward, in ringing tones, exclaimed:

"Hold! Paul Presbury, were you any other man in college, I would try my strength against yours, and here on the campus we would have it out; but you made a false charge against me; I gave you the lie, and you return it with a blow. Now, sir, I demand that you meet me as man to man, choosing your own weapons. I refer you to Ned Rayford, as my friend."

So saying, Ralph Roy wheeled suddenly,

slipped his hand into the arm of Ned Rayford, and walked from the campus, leaving behind him a scene of excitement.

Going to his room, in one wing of the building, Ralph and Ned sat down to await the coming of the friend of Paul Presbury, for they knew a duel must follow.

They had not long to wait, for Hugh Howe soon put in an appearance, his gross and cruel face in a broad smile at the anticipated *sport*, for this youth had once been severely thrashed by Ralph, for bullying small boys, and he entertained for the handsome Roy a sincere hatred; and now was most anxious to have Paul Presbury punish him.

The preliminaries were soon arranged. Ralph Roy and Paul Presbury were to meet on the brookside at sunrise the following morning; the weapons were to be pistols. Of course the meeting would be deadly, as both students were crack shots.

The affair was also to be kept a dead secret from all the professors, and the mass of students.

But Classical College had also another cause of excitement at that time: a grand mask ball was to be given by a wealthy gentleman living near, to the students, and the young ladies of an adjacent seminary were to be invited; hence there were great preparations for the affair, and Ralph Roy, after arranging his meeting with his rival, strolled into town to get his costume for the night.

According to agreement, no lamps were to be lit in the college halls that night, so that no student could recognize his companions by seeing from what rooms they came, and thus it was expected that all would go *incog*.

About nine o'clock, a student, attired as a Buccaneer Chief, left his room in the college, and wended his way, with numerous others, all in mask and costume, across the park to the brilliantly illuminated house of Judge Mercer, half a mile from the collegiate grounds.

Arriving there, this bold sea rover was welcomed by his host, and selecting a fair Persian Princess from the throng, he was soon enjoying with her a charming waltz.

As he led her to her seat, a Greek officer advanced, and said somewhat rudely:

"I blame *you*, not the lady, sir, for depriving me of my dance just now; but it is like *you*."

The Buccaneer turned quickly to the Persian maid:

"Were you engaged to this surly fellow for that waltz?"

"Yes; but he was not there to claim it, and hence forfeited it; it will give me pleasure, and punish him, if you will give me your arm for a promenade."

With a smile of triumph, the Buccaneer offered his arm and led the way out upon the moonlit piazza, followed by a smothered imprecation from the angry Greek.

"Can I ask if you know who is our cross friend?" asked the young man, as he walked leisurely along with the maiden.

"I think it is a student—Mr. Presbury."

"I believe you are right; I thought I recognized his voice."

"And you are—"

"Your lover, fair maid of Persia," gallantly said the Buccaneer; "but come, we will have another waltz;" and the two again joined in the graceful dance, while watching them with angry eyes, stood the Greek officer.

And thus it went on for several hours, the Buccaneer and Persian maid being inseparable, and seeming to delight in teasing the Greek, who followed them moodily about.

"He evidently mistakes me for Toinette Ramsey. She was to wear this dress, but I exchanged with her; excuse me now, please, and I will look her up and tell her how angry we have made her lover, Paul."

Away glided the maiden, and instantly the Greek was by the side of the Buccaneer.

"I would see you in the garden, sir, down by the fountain; if you are not a *coward* you will follow me."

The Buccaneer bowed low, and instantly followed to the designated spot—a quiet place surrounded by dense foliage, through which streamed the moonlight brightly.

"It has been your desire to insult me to-night. You wear a sword; if you can use it, draw, for one who would have your life is before you."

The words were in earnest, and the Buccaneer instantly placed himself upon the defensive.

That both were students from the college was evident, and, the moment the weapons crossed, that both were good swordsmen was also evident.

"To-night is as good a time as to-morrow," said the Buccaneer, and at once, with terrible fury a deadly combat was begun.

From the first the Buccaneer seemed to hold the vantage, and was desirous of disarming, rather than of slaying his enemy; but failing in this and narrowly missing a death-wound, he pressed earnestly forward, struck down the guard of his antagonist, and ran his sword through his body.

"My God! you have killed me, Paul Presbury!" and the Greek fell heavily to the ground.

"Great Heaven! I am not Paul Presbury. I thought *you* that man," and the Buccaneer sprung forward and tore off the mask of the man he had run through.

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy. Ned Rayford, has my hand taken your life?" and dragging off his mask he revealed the pallid face of *Ralph Roy*.

"Ralph—this is indeed hard—to—bear—I thought—it—was—Presbury, and wished to kill or wound him—that your life might not be taken—to-morrow; I forgive you—Ralph; it was my fault—tell my poor sister Clare that—no, let me die here alone, and let—no—one—know—I—fell—by your hand—the hand of—my truest friend."

Ralph Roy, his heart almost crushed by the blow, bent over nearer to his friend; but no more words came; the lips quivered in the moonlight; a sigh mingled with the balmy night breeze, a pressure of the hand, and Ned Rayford was dead.

CHAPTER II.

FACE TO FACE.

AWAY sped the moments, and still Ralph Roy knelt beside his dead friend—his *protege*, for Ned Rayford was a poor farmer's son, and the other the only child of a wealthy planter in a far Southern State.

The small farm of the Rayfords joined the broad acres of the Roys, and hence the boys had grown up the best of friends, been school-mates, and when Ralph at last went to a classical college he insisted that Ned should accompany him, and prevailed upon his father to pay all the expenses of his friend, which the planter gladly did, as his son's wish was his law.

Another bond between the youths was Clare Rayford, the beautiful sister of Ned, and the only being who had perfect influence over the wild nature of Ralph; for, in spite of all his noble impulses, the young planter was a reckless and wild fellow, only held in check by the hope of winning the praise of Clare Rayford.

Now his own hand had forever divided him from the maiden; he had taken the life of her brother! True, he did so unknowingly; still, the grim phantom of death arose between himself and Clare, and the thought maddened him.

At length he arose, his brain a whirl of thought, his heart throbbing with acute pain.

"I will leave him here until after I have met Presbury; then I will tell all—if I live. But I cannot go home. No, I must be a wanderer—an outcast henceforth! Yes, I will place him here in this summer-house."

Raising the body tenderly, Ralph bore it to a small arbor near at hand, and placed it upon a rustic seat.

Then in painful meditation he stood gazing down upon the dead—stood there until the gray dawn warned him to be away.

Taking the lifeless hand in both his own, he pressed it hard and turned away, walking rapidly toward the college.

Gaining his room without discovery, he at once set about his preparations for the meeting with his rival, and in half an hour left the quiet building, where all seemed yet wrapped in repose.

A walk of half an hour brought him to the designated spot of meeting, and he found no one there; but he had not long to wait ere he heard voices, and the next moment beheld three forms approaching.

At a glance he recognized his rival, then Hugh Howe and another student.

Stepping toward the latter, he said quickly:

"Walters, it was impossible for Ned Rayford to accompany me, and I came alone—will you act for me in the absence of my second?"

"Certainly, Roy; I came as the friend of Presbury, but will act for you, with his permission."

The permission was readily given, and the arrangements soon made.

Then Paul Presbury, pale but determined, and Ralph Roy, as livid as death, yet cool as an icicle, took their places fifteen paces apart.

Hugh Howe had won the word, and in his cruel tones came the ominous question:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

Both students bowed, and Hugh Howe continued:

"Fire! one—"

Ere he could say more the pistol of Ralph Roy flashed forth, and the second after, the weapon of Paul Presbury was discharged.

Paul Presbury, with arms outstretched and staring eyes, fell heavily in his tracks, a stream of blood spurting from his side, while the bullet from his pistol striking the barrel of the weapon held by Ralph Roy knocked it from his grasp.

Just at that moment, when a look of horror came over the faces of Hugh Howe and Walters, a man dashed up on horseback, followed by a negro, also mounted.

"Ha! this is bad work. You seem fond of blood, young sir; but your career of red-handed crime shall end here, and the gallows will cut short your days."

All looked with surprise upon the stranger. They recognized him as the village constable, Sandy Ross, a terror to the wild students of the college.

"What mean you, Sandy Ross?" asked Ralph sternly, advancing toward the officer.

"I mean, young fellow, that this negro

was asleep in the garden, last night, and saw you kill Ned Rayford; as soon as he could escape he came to me, and seeking you I have found you here, and arrest you for a double murder, for Presbury is doubtless dead."

A sudden impulse seized upon Ralph Roy—must he surrender and be hung?

His duel with Paul Presbury he looked upon as legitimate, for dueling was tolerated, if not sanctioned, in those days, in the early part of the present century.

But what might not the negro swear against him?

He was known to be an escaped slave, and hated Southerners, and in that Northern state his oath against him would pass as good as a white man's.

These thoughts flitted like lightning through the brain of Ralph Roy, and he at once determined upon his course.

Springing forward, he dealt the constable a blow that felled him to the earth.

Then, seizing his overcoat from where he had thrown it upon the ground, he drew from an inner pocket a double-barreled pistol, and the next moment had seized the rein of the constable's horse.

At that instant Sandy Ross arose to his feet and cried:

"I call upon you to help me seize that murderer!"

The student Walters remained passive; but Hugh Howe rushed forward with the constable.

Ralph was just about to mount; but he turned quickly, raised his pistol and fired.

Down went Sandy Ross, while Hugh Howe vanished behind a tree.

Then with a cool presence of mind that was remarkable, Ralph Roy discharged the second barrel at the horse of the negro, muttering through his shut teeth:

"That will cut off pursuit anyhow for a while."

The horse bounded high in the air, and then fell forward, staggered and went down, pinioning the negro beneath him in his fall.

With a bound Ralph was in the saddle, a word to the spirited animal, and like the wind he sped away.

Ralph knew the horse well—he was the swiftest of foot in the neighborhood, and it had always been the boast of Sandy Ross that he could go a hundred miles in a day and not mind it.

"I'll put his speed and endurance to the test, for I am a fugitive now—a hunted murderer, and by this last act a horse-thief."

Ralph spoke bitterly; but there was a cool determination in his tones that proved he was desperate and would not be taken alive.

CHAPTER III.

THE FUGITIVE YACHT.

AFTER a day's hard travel, Ralph Roy at length came out of a deep forest that bordered the bank of a large river.

The night had come on, and the moon was just rising above the other shore, and the beauty of the scene caused Ralph to draw rein and gaze thoughtfully out over the waters, while his horse stood with head bent down and panting sides.

"Poor fellow, I will turn you loose for a rest and food," he said, touched by the evident suffering of his steed.

Dismounting he took off the saddle and bridle, placed them against a tree, and gave the horse his freedom, for he had spied a small boat upon the shore, and determined to make that a means of further flight.

Utterly worn out he threw himself down in the stern of the boat to enjoy a sleep, for he sadly needed rest.

How long he slept he did not know; but the hum of voices at length awakened him.

Opening his eyes he discovered that the tide had risen, and that his boat was some twenty feet from the shore, where a small anchor held it fast.

Upon the bank stood several dark forms, a score in number.

Lying perfectly quiet, after raising his head sufficient to see the party ashore, Ralph waited for further developments, for he was certain that the crowd were in pursuit of him, but that they had not yet discovered his whereabouts was evident.

Then above the general hum a voice said, impatiently:

"Why does not the captain come? He is an hour late, and yonder is the yacht as impatient as we are to get away."

Ralph turned his head quickly and beheld, anchored close under the other shore of the stream or inlet, a large schooner, the moonlight falling brightly upon her glistening spars.

"They cannot be after me—unless they think I have taken a small boat and gone out to sea," he murmured; and then he turned his attention once more to the party on shore.

"I'll tell you," exclaimed another voice, and a very youthful one. "I guess the captain will come with the other party."

"No, he was to have come with us. Here are the other boys now."

A score of other forms came from the forest and halted upon the shore, where they were greeted by those already there.

"Is the captain with you?" asked several voices anxiously.

"No; we expected to find him here. Where can he be?"

Just then a man came hastily from the woods, and said, in a disappointed tone:

"It's all up, fellows; they caught the captain, and the police are preparing to pounce upon us, so we'd better scatter."

A score of oaths and cries greeted this news, and a dozen voices cried:

"Let's seize the yacht! We'll be caught if we go back the same way we came."

"The yacht! Never mind the captain! We'll save ourselves, and put to sea."

This proposal seemed to meet almost unanimous approval; but one voice asked:

"Who among us is sailor enough to manage her at sea?"

This was a poser, it seemed; but several cried:

"We'll cruise along the coast with her until we can pick up a captain. If we stay here we will see prison cells by to-morrow."

"Gentlemen, if you need a captain allow me to offer myself."

All started and turned their eyes in the direction from whence came the voice.

The moonlight showed them a tall, manly form standing erect in the boat, and gazing toward them.

"Who are you?" was the question that arose to every lip, while every right hand sought the butt of a pistol, for they believed they were betrayed.

"I am, it seems, something like yourselves—one anxious to escape the bloodhounds of the law. I am, a fugitive, and on my tracks are those who would hang me did they catch me. I am a sailor, having been raised on the water, I may say, and for name you can call me—Ralph—yes, Reckless Ralph, if you will, for I dare to be more reckless than any one of your party."

This speech, delivered in a cool, indifferent, yet bitter tone, was received with distrust, at first, but it was evident that the words had made an impression, for after an instant's silence, one voice said hoarsely:

"If you're a good sailor, and have your neck in a noose, you're the fellow we want for a capt'in, for you'll take good care of us to save your own head."

"You are right, my friend; but let us lose no time. I'll bring my boat inshore, and we'll carry out your intention in coming here—for I heard your conversation—and board yonder yacht."

The next instant Ralph reached the shore, and every eye was bent curiously upon him.

"Have you spoken the truth? You seem but a boy," said a man, stepping in front of him.

"As to my age, I believe I am as old as any I see in this party, and a good deal older than some. You all seem to be nothing more than boys," said Ralph, smilingly, glancing

over the faces before him, all of them most youthful.

"That's what we are—boys on a lark. The world went hard with us, and we concluded to strike out on the high seas for ourselves; but our captain, a regular old freebooter, has been caught, and that stranded us all here in sight of our prize, for we intended to capture yonder yacht. She belongs to a wealthy naval officer; you see his mansion on the other shore; and when we are at sea we'll hoist our flag."

Ralph was now as thoroughly reckless of consequences as was the speaker, and he answered at once:

"If you would know that I speak the truth about being a fugitive, against yonder tree you will find my saddle and bridle, and in the woods is my horse, dead beat by a hard day's ride; but come, we lose time. Into this boat, all who would go on board of yonder yacht."

The last was given in a ringing tone of command, and a dozen men at once sprung into the boat.

"Come on! She'll hold the rest of you! No delay now, boys."

Again the order was obeyed; and the heavily laden boat started out from the shore, and headed across the water toward the yacht.

"Halt! Return in that boat, or we'll fire upon you!"

There was no mistaking the stern order; it meant business, and upon the shore stood a large party of horsemen.

For an instant it seemed as if a panic had seized upon those in the boat, and some began to back water, while other oarsmen pulled desperately in the other direction, and cries to "Go back!" and others to "Go on!" were heard upon all sides.

"Silence, men! I command this boat."

Instantly there followed a dead silence, and then Ralph continued:

"Give way with a will, men!"

In regular order the oars again fell into the water, and the boat once more moved rapidly away from the shore.

"Will you return, or shall we fire?" cried the same voice from the land.

"Just as you please; it is immaterial to us," calmly responded Ralph.

Instantly there came the stern order:

"Fire upon them, men!"

A few straggling shots, an irregular volley, shrieks of pain, groans and curses followed the shot from the shore; but above the confusion came the voice of Reckless Ralph, as he had named himself:

"They are in earnest, lads; we must be too; pull with a will!"

In spite of two dead and several wounded

in their midst, the cool tones of their new leader inspired confidence. The oarsmen bent to their work with desperate energy, and were soon out of range.

A half-hour's hard rowing, and the boat ran alongside the schooner—a beautiful yacht of a hundred tons burden—long, narrow, deep in the hull, and with saucily raking masts.

"Spring on board, lads, and up with that anchor. Hoist the mainsail, foresail and flying-jib! Lively, lads, for you work for your lives!"

Had any of the boat's crew been in any doubt before, of their young leader, they were no longer so, as they heard his stern voice ringing out the orders; and, all of them, with a few exceptions, fair sailors, sprung to work with a will, and in five minutes the white sails were run up, the anchor had left the bottom, and the swift schooner was gliding out of the inlet, all upon her deck busy, excepting two dead forms, and several wounded, who lay groaning with pain and casting fitful glances toward those that lay so ghastly and silent near them.

"We've got to make good time, as word was sent down to the lower bay, where there's a cutter and a brig-of-war anchored. You see, our plot to seize the yacht was betrayed by some of our number, and I fear we are going to have hot work of it, sir," and the speaker looked earnestly upon Ralph, who had the wheel, but made no reply, and the man, who was the messenger that had brought the news of the capture of their captain continued:

"We're near the upper end of New York now, sir, and *might* run out East river and through the Sound; but we've no pilot for Hell-Gate."

"I have passed through Hell-Gate several times, going to Boston, and think I can run it now; I'll try it, anyhow; but what have we here?"

As Ralph spoke, there suddenly emerged from the cabin companionway a female form—a maiden, that the moonlight plainly showed was very beautiful and scarcely over sixteen years of age.

Behind her came a young sailor, who called out:

"I found her asleep in one of the state-rooms, and thought at first she was a ghost."

Giving the wheel to the man at his side, Ralph stepped forward, and politely raising his hat, said:

"Why is it we find you here, young lady?"

"Are you the commander, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then I will confess all to you, if you will promise not to put me ashore."

Ralph was surprised; the young girl spoke in a tone that implied she had some strange confession to make, and her manner showed no surprise at finding them in possession of the schooner.

"Yes, I will hear what you have to say. Come into the cabin, please."

The maiden at once obeyed, and in half an hour Ralph again came on deck.

A look of concern swept over his features, as he noted that the heavens had suddenly become black with clouds, and a terrible storm was threatening to burst upon them.

"We'll have to run the lower bay. I dare not attempt Hell-Gate in this blow that is coming on," said Ralph, to those of the crew that stood near the wheel.

"We'll have to decide at once, sir; we are nearly abreast the mouth of East river," said the youth, who still held the helm, and who was apparently about twenty-one years of age.

"Then we'll go down the bay—it would be sheer madness to attempt to run Hell-Gate. See, the storm is upon us! Double reef the fore and mainsails. Hold! is not that a vessel-of-war yonder?"

All turned their gaze in the direction indicated, and half a dozen voices cried:

"The brig-of-war, and the cutter—coming after us."

It seemed but too true; the two vessels were rushing rapidly up the harbor, and with the evident intention of heading off the schooner ere she could round the city and fly away for the sound.

"It must be Hell-Gate then; but I dread the duty. Hold! men, we must not lessen sail. We may as well capsize as go upon the rocks," and Ralph spoke with utter recklessness.

"If it's come to that, I move we surrender the craft. We'll only go to prison for a few years," said a hoarse voice, and a dozen took up the cry.

"Yes, run her alongside the docks, and we'll seek refuge in the city."

A cheer greeted the words, and a burly youth sprung forward and seized the helm; but it was the last act of his life, as there came a flash, a report, and the mutineer fell dead, shot through the brain by Reckless Ralph.

"I command this craft. It is your duty to obey, and I will see that you do. I'll run through Hell-Gate, or wreck the schooner on the rocks."

There was something absolutely appalling in the cool courage of the youth, and the others fell back; but it was only momentarily, for they would not be sacrificed to a whim of their new leader. No, they would heave him overboard, and then run ashore,

for the brig and cutter were dangerously near astern.

Ralph knew that a crisis had come. Two vessels-of-war were pressing on in pursuit; Hell-Gate was not far ahead, and he was comparatively alone amid a mutinous crew; but he had made the venture, and he was determined not to yield.

"Come, boys, into the sea with him," cried the hoarse-voiced ringleader, and he sprung forward to fall dead at the feet of Reckless Ralph, who again fired with his unerring aim.

"Hold all; I will pilot the schooner through Hell-Gate—I know the channel well."

All excitement at once was over. The maiden had come from the cabin, and stood before them.

"You! a girl, pilot a vessel?" cried many voices.

"Ay, a girl can do it. Will you trust me, sir?"

"Implicitly, and I will aid you with the wheel. Ready all! Lower away the fore-sail, and double reef the mainsail and jib. The gale will be upon us within the minute."

At the commanding tones of the youth, the crew sprung at once to obey his orders, and the schooner was soon ready to meet the shock of the storm.

Another moment and it was upon them, and with fearful fury; but the girl-pilot and boy-commander undismayed held the sharp bows of the schooner straight for the foaming waters of Hell-Gate.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

THERE was something striking indeed, in the position that the fugitives found themselves—under a commander they had not known two hours, and a mere boy in years; driven swiftly through the wild waters before a relentless and howling storm, and with a young girl as their pilot through a danger from which the boldest among them shrunk.

A wild set of young dare-devils, they had been led into a plot by an older hand—a disgraced naval officer, who had turned to smuggling, and boldly determined upon the cutting out of the schooner, and cruising under his own flag, with a crew of daring youths whom he had selected from various walks in life, and who he knew were not particular as to the service they embarked in, so that it brought them adventure, and plenty to eat and drink.

But some irregularities in his plans had caused the arrest of the leader at the very last moment, and the crew would have had to return as best they could to the city, had not a leader presented himself in the person

of Ralph Roy, who now stood at the schooner's helm with the calm air of one who felt he had a right there.

Upon his left, her tiny hands upon the wheel-spokes, her hair blowing in *neglige* about her shoulders, stood the young girl who had announced her ability to pilot the schooner through Hell-Gate.

Her face, as seen by the flashes of lightning, for dark clouds obscured the light of the moon, was very pale, yet fearless and determined.

The same flashes also revealed the brig-of-war and cutter rounding the Battery and heading up the East river in full pursuit.

A short distance more and the waves bounded madly around the little vessel; the roar was terrific and the spray drenched the decks; yet on through the darkness and danger—on through the foaming caldron, bounding, pitching, sweeping low before the blast the schooner sped, her fearless young helmsman keeping her steadily on her course, while the girl-pilot stood by his side, now and then, when he seemed at fault, giving directions how to steer to avoid a fearfully threatening rock, for they were entering Hell-Gate, then a far different channel to run from what is now.

"I cannot see here. I will go forward and lash myself in the foremast shrouds. Station a man between us to pass the word," and without waiting reply, the young girl, aided by one of the crew, went forward.

A moment after her clear voice was heard crying:

"Starboard your helm!"

"Starboard 'tis!" came the answer in the calm tones of Reckless Ralph.

Then, far astern burst a light, not the lightning's flash, though followed by a deep roar, and over the schooner's deck flew an iron shot. The brig had opened fire.

Then again and again, from the bows of both pursuing vessels flashed the guns, and the shrieking shot rushed past with fearful velocity, to strike upon some huge rock, or bury themselves beneath the seething waters.

Presently a crash was heard, and the main-topmast was shattered in fragments. Had it been the mainmast no power could have saved the schooner, for she was then in the most dangerous part of the seething channel.

As the stanch vessel shivered under the shock, every one of the crew trembled; but as though scorning danger, the voice of the girl-pilot was again heard:

"Steady as you are!"

"Steady 'tis," replied Ralph, his every energy bent upon his work.

"Hard down your helm! hard down!"

"Hard down 'tis!"

"Steady as you are!"

"Steady 'tis."

"Hard! hard up your helm!"

While the above orders were given in the girl's clearest tones, the crew were ready to act upon the instant, and Ralph obeyed with an alacrity that proved he knew the danger of reckless steering.

And, through all, the schooner, though minding her helm, staggered and reeled as though the mad waters would engulf her; but, shaking off the volumes of water from her decks, she rushed on, and in a few more moments glided out of the vortex of Hell-gate. The wild channel, through darkness and storm, had been run in safety, and a girl had been the schooner's pilot.

Their pursuers dared not enter the dread Gate; so the fugitive yacht was free.

Although the winds yet drove them furiously along, and the storm-clouds hovered threateningly above, the crew felt that they were safe, and as the girl-pilot glided from her post in the fore-shrouds and disappeared in the cabin, one and all burst forth with a cheer to do her honor, for they felt that they owed their freedom, nay their lives, to her cool courage and skill.

CHAPTER V.

RECKLESS RALPH'S BOLD PLOT.

THROUGH the remaining hours of the night Ralph stood at the helm of the schooner, which rushed through Long Island Sound with a speed that would have defied all pursuit.

Shortly after midnight the storm swept away, but a strong and steady ten-knot breeze still continued, and the yacht's rapid course and the gantlet she had run raised the spirits of the crew amazingly.

When the sunlight came, Ralph glanced searchingly over his companions, and among them recognized several whom he felt that he could make his officers; for now that he was launched upon the ocean as a fugitive, he was determined not to be taken, if possible, and he wished to inspire his comrades with the same spirit.

The youth who had seemed to second him more than any one else he called to him, and asked:

"What is your name?"

"I will give you the one I hail under now; the other I have disgraced. You see, captain, I was well raised, but got into trouble at home and went to sea, and if I am to be hung I don't want the old folks at home to see what has been the fate of their son. The boys call me Mark Mandeville."

"Well, Mr. Mandeville, I wish you to be

my first officer, and will you suggest two more of your companions for second and third officers, and a boatswain?"

"You seem in earnest, sir, and I am glad we were lucky enough to meet you. Yes, there's Sylvester—I don't know his other name—was dismissed from the navy, and Calvin Conrad, who was expelled from Yale College; they would make good officers, for they have both been to sea, and Rupert Vane would be a first-class boatswain, so we are fixed."

"Yes; call those you have named aft, and I will talk with them."

The three youths now presented themselves, and the bold spirit of Ralph at once proved to them that he was to be in reality the commander of the vessel, and they accepted their separate ranks without a word.

"Now, Mr. Sylvester, you having been in the navy will understand how to place the crew, and I wish you to do so at once, and all of you must understand that I am to have naval discipline on board this schooner. By the way, had you decided upon any move after cutting out the schooner?"

"Yes; we were going to smuggling, and—"

"Well, I have a plan to propose now, and after that we will decide upon our future course. I suppose you are willing to be governed by me?"

Of course they were, for the daring young fugitive had gained over them a complete mastery. They had seen that he was a thorough seaman, for Ralph's plantation home was on the Mexican Gulf, and his father had always kept a yacht, and often cruised in it in summer up the northern coast. He therefore held over them the complete mastery of confidence.

"My plan is first to do an act of humanity," began Ralph. "The young girl now in the cabin is a daughter of a distinguished naval officer, who is now absent on a cruise in foreign waters. She has also a brother, a lieutenant in the navy, and now in irons on his vessel, in Boston harbor, charged with killing his superior officer and captain."

"It seems the two were rivals, and when ashore together on a gunning expedition, in Cuba, the captain was killed—a sailor says, by the hand of the lieutenant; but that officer declares that it was an accident, the captain having shot himself through carelessness."

"Be that as it may, the lieutenant is to be tried for his life, and will be certainly hung, for the sailor's word will condemn him."

"The young girl says her brother begs to be allowed to get two persons who he said witnessed the accident; but the court-martial will not allow this, and this vessel was to have started last night to Boston to bring the officer to New York for trial."

"This schooner is, the maiden says, the yacht of Commodore Dorcas, a naval officer living on the adjoining place to her father, and a bitter enemy to her family; and, as no other vessel could be secured, he sent for a crew of his own ship to man her and proceed to Boston for the prisoner."

"The crew were to board her about the time we took possession, and, anxious to aid her brother's escape, or at least see him ere he came to New York, the maiden went out to the yacht in a small skiff, which she cast adrift, and secreted herself in the cabin."

"Believing that we were the naval crew, after we got under way, she came on deck, and fortunate it is for us that she did, or we would now be food for fishes, were it not for her skill as a pilot, which skill in passing through Hell-Gate she learned from her brother, who used to sail through the dangerous channel with her often, when he was home on leave."

"Now, my plan is to reward this maiden for our lives by saving the life of her brother. The schooner is provisioned for a two months' cruise, and in the cabin is the clothing of the former crew, and also the uniforms of the officers. These we can put on, and running into Boston harbor, I will boldly board the vessel-of-war and state that Commodore Dorcas sent me for the prisoner."

"After obtaining him we will run to Cuba, give him a chance to procure his witnesses, and after setting his sister and himself on American soil, I will make known a plan I have to arm and equip this vessel in handsome style. What say you, gentlemen?"

A number of the crew, in fact nearly all of them, had gathered around the boy-commander as he was speaking, and a wild cheer of approval answered him.

But there were some who frowned down the cheering, and loud murmurs were heard in the crowd from those who had not been so lucky as to be appointed officers.

"What is it you lads wish?" asked Ralph, stepping in front of the grumblers, and determined to quell at once any opposition to his control.

"We've just got ourselves out of a scrape, and if we go alongside a vessel-of-war we will be bagged certain," said a wickedly-disposed fellow, gruffly.

"We will never be suspected of being other than what we represent ourselves," said Ralph quietly; but there was a danger,

ous gliter in his dark eyes, for he felt that trouble was ahead.

"Well, we don't agree to any such foolish act," responded the ringleader, and it was evident that his bold manner was winning allies from those who had already sworn allegiance to Ralph.

And it was no wonder, for they were a wild set, who had run off for a sea-voyage, expecting to be under the command of one in whom they had perfect confidence; but already had they lost several of their number, and three or four wounded were groaning dismally forward; they had narrowly escaped death, and also capture, and were willing to get out of the scrape as best they could.

But they were now under an iron will, boy though he was, and one who, having cast his lot with them was determined to allow no cowardly surrender, for to Ralph Roy, surrender meant death. He had not in the excitement of existing circumstances, forgotten the scenes of blood in which he had been an actor, and he would die rather than give up now.

But he seemed willing to conciliate, and answered quietly:

"I do not wish to be your unwilling commander. If there is any one else you prefer—Mr. Mandeville, Sylvester, or Conrad, I will yield my place to him."

"No, no, no!" cried a dozen voices, and among them the young officers named; all wanted to shirk the responsibility of leader.

"Well, sir, you had best return to your duty, for if I am to be captain of this vessel I will allow no mutiny."

The ringleader and several of his followers held a conversation in a low tone, and then from the crowd flashed forth a pistol; they would settle the matter by the death of the young commander.

Reckless Ralph staggered back, his hand to his head; but in an instant he recovered himself, and in an twinkling two shots rung out, and two death-cries went up; the ringleader and the youth who had fired the shot fell heavily to the deck.

Like a maddened tiger Reckless Ralph sprung forward, and striking right and left the mutineers went down before his powerful blows, while at his back came the stanch and true ones of the crew.

An instant only the battle lasted; then the mutineers bawled loudly for quarter.

"Put those men all in irons, and keep them there until further orders, Mr. Sylvester," sternly ordered Ralph.

"Ay, ay, sir!" cheerily sung out the young officer, and the half-dozen mutineers were huddled off forward.

"You are wounded—is it serious?" said a soft, sweet voice at Ralph's side.

It was the young girl—Jessie Reginald.

"No, a mere scratch. It stunned me for a second, for it grazed my temple."

"Come, let me dress it for you; come now, please."

Ralph silently followed her into the cabin, and as he threw himself down in an easy-chair, said quietly:

"We will have no more trouble now, Miss Reginald; and I am glad to tell you that we are bound for Boston, and your brother will soon be free."

The young girl could make no reply, for her heart was full of joy.

After a while she said:

"What cruel fate has driven you to sea, a fugitive, I do not know; but certain am I that you have a noble heart, and will not willfully do wrong."

Ralph made no reply. Bitter memories were crowding swiftly upon him, and he hastily left the cabin.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARING GAME.

A STATELY vessel-of-war rode at anchor in the harbor of Boston, and upon her deck paced her officers, glad to be home again after a year's cruise in Southern seas.

But below decks, confined to his state-room and in irons, was one upon whose handsome young face rested no look of joy. Nay, an expression of deepest sadness was there, for he was accused of taking the life of his commander.

This man was Arthur Reginald, the young officer, to save whose life his beautiful sister was boldly plotting.

Suddenly a loud hail startled the young officer, and he glanced out of the open port and beheld a vessel just rounding to within a short distance of the man-of-war.

"That is the Flying Phantom—the yacht of Commodore Dorcas. Yes, he will conduct my trial, and his hatred of my father, nay, of all my name, will cause him to condemn me to death. He has never forgiven my father for killing his brother in a duel," said Arthur Reginald, and he bent his gaze more earnestly upon the little schooner, which was now sending a boat aboard the sloop-of-war.

As the cutter passed the open port, Arthur glanced upon its occupants—four seamen, a coxswain, and a youthful officer in the uniform of a junior lieutenant.

That young officer was Reckless Ralph, who boldly mounted the side of the vessel-of-war, and was conducted into the cabin,

where the senior lieutenant, then commanding, awaited him.

Thoroughly informed by Jessie Reginald, of the officers on board the vessel, and all circumstances necessary for him to play his part well, Ralph saluted the lieutenant in an easy, but polite manner, and at once made known his errand: Commodore Dorcas had sent him in his yacht, to bear the prisoner, Arthur Reginald, to New York, where he was to be at once tried for his life.

Though the lieutenant did not recall the name of Ralph Roy as an officer in the navy, he never for a moment held suspicion that all was not well, and asking his visitor to have a glass of wine with him, he at once gave orders for the removal of the prisoner to the boat alongside, at the same time saying:

"This is a most unfortunate affair, Mr. Roy. Reginald is one of the most popular men in the service, yet a feeling of ill-will had existed between him and Captain Blaine during the whole cruise, and this strengthens the feeling that he killed the captain, though it is hard to believe. I sincerely hope he will be able to prove that he is innocent of the terrible charge. You will want the seaman also, who is witness against him?"

This was a thing that neither Ralph nor Jessie Reginald had thought of; but the youth answered without hesitation:

"Of course, sir; it was negligent in me to have forgotten half my duty. Now, as my orders are to return with all speed, I will get off."

After another glass of wine with the lieutenant, Ralph went on deck, and thence into his boat alongside, where Arthur Reginald and the seaman—the witness against him—were already seated.

"We have been a week in harbor, Mr. Roy, and I hope orders will soon come giving us a short leave. When I sent word to New York of our arrival, I made known that many of my men were on the sick-list, and I fondly hoped you would have instructions for me."

"I am sorry, sir; but I was only told to get the prisoner and the witness. Farewell, lieutenant."

Seating himself in the stern sheets, Ralph gave the order to give way, and the boat moved rapidly away toward the schooner, the fugitives delighted at the success of their plan.

"Lieutenant Reginald, will you enter the cabin, please? Here, let me first knock off those irons," and Ralph unlocked the manacles that bound the prisoner, who, with a look of surprise, entered the yacht's cabin.

"Mr. Sylvester, put that seaman in irons

at once, and, lads, stand ready to at once get under way. A message may arrive at any moment that will spoil our success."

Arthur Reginald entered the cabin and was greeted with a glad cry from Jessie, who in a few words told him all.

At first he refused to accept his liberty under the circumstances; but Jessie pleaded with him earnestly, and urged that he would now be enabled to obtain the witnesses who could prove his innocence, and he yielded.

"But, what will be done with the yacht, Jessie? This young fellow and his companions, from what you tell me, are no better than buccaneers."

"Never mind them, Arthur; they are a wild set, and their boy-leader is a remarkable person, who has saved your life, for I know Commodore Dorcas intended having you condemned."

"What madness caused these youths to run off with the yacht I do not know, unless it is a wild spirit of adventure; but their very crime has saved you, and I will say no word against them, for Reckless Ralph, the captain, has said that he would land you in Cuba, after he had placed me at some spot on the coast where I can get conveyance to New York."

"And then they will turn buccaneers?"

"I fear so, Arthur; but of course I did not question them. I was too glad to serve you to quarrel with the means of so doing."

"You are right, Jessie, and I will not do so. That Captain Ralph is indeed a remarkable fellow, and played his bold game to perfection. He was as cool as ice, and as fearless as a lion. I will get him to land you on the Jersey shore, and then take me to Cuba, paying him liberally for his services."

"No, no, Arthur, buccaneer though he may be, that would insult him," cried Jessie.

"Well, sister mine, I will reward him in some way."

"You can get the witnesses, can you not, Arthur?" suddenly asked Jessie.

"Oh, yes, though I dislike to bring them before the public gaze. They are a Cuban lady of wealth and good family, and her daughter—"

"Nita Valdos, of whom you wrote?"

"Yes, and my promised wife; they saw Captain Blaine fall by his own hand—the accidental discharge of his gun, for he was visiting the mansion with me; but the seaman who witnessed it did not know they saw it, nor did I, until our vessel arrived in Boston harbor, when I received a letter from Nita telling me that she learned I was accused of the murder of my captain, and wrote me by the Mail Packet, to say that both her mother and herself had witnessed the sad accident from the housetop, for we were of

our way to the shore to return on board ship at the time of the accident.

"When Captain Blaine fell, I instantly bore him to the boat, rowed aboard ship, and got under way for Havana.

"Imagine my surprise to find myself accused, the following day, of the captain's murder. I surrendered myself, was put in irons, and asked that I might not be tried for several months; but this was denied, as it was said I could not get witnesses, and the seaman, whom I once had flogged, swore point-blank that he saw me take Captain Blaine's gun, put it to his head and fire; but, thank God, I now have a chance to prove my innocence, through your love and the splendid pluck of this boy-commander—But hark! what noise is that?"

Stern orders were now heard on deck, and hurrying feet, while a deep boom, and the roar of a solid shot were heard.

With a bound Arthur Reginald was on deck, and close behind him came his sister.

"What is the trouble?" he cried.

"I am crowding the Phantom with canvas. Our trick has been discovered, for I saw a shore-boat board your vessel—doubtless bearing an overland messenger from New York—ha! there comes another shot from the sloop-of-war," and Reckless Ralph coolly took the helm, and headed for the open sea, his handsome, fearless face showing no shadow of concern.

"Captain, put back. I will surrender myself. You shall not be blown out of the water on my account," said Arthur Reginald, firmly.

"No, nor hung on my own account. I will run the gantlet of the sloop's fire, and also that of the Castle. The only thing is, I do not know the channel, but we'll risk it."

"I know it, sir, and will take the wheel, if you are determined to go on; but it seems like madness."

"We'll take the chances, sir," and with a quiet smile, Ralph resigned the helm to Arthur Reginald, and with his now obedient crew, bent every energy to safely passing through the terrible ordeal before them.

CHAPTER VII.

IN DANGER.

WHEN Arthur Reginald took the helm of the Flying Phantom, the yacht was running swiftly along under a seven-knot breeze, and between Chelsea and the Castle.

He had, when in port on several other occasions, sailed over every foot of the harbor, and knew the channel quite well; hence he felt that he could safely run the gantlet; but

the danger was from the sloop-of-war, which was now keeping up a rapid fire after the flying vessel.

Then, if they escaped harm from the sloop, another danger had to be boldly met, for the Castle would open fire, well knowing that the yacht had been in some mischief and must be brought to.

Under every inch of canvas that would draw the Flying Phantom sped swiftly along, and a cheer burst from her crew as they beheld the shots from the sloop-of-war falling short, and no damage done their beautiful vessel.

"They are alive at the fort; the firing has alarmed them, and we will catch it. Miss Reginald, I must insist upon your going into the cabin," said Ralph, firmly.

"Yes, Jessie, you are in danger here," added Arthur, earnestly.

"And so are you, brother, and so is this brave young gentleman—ay, and his gallant crew—for my sake and for yours they have placed themselves in danger, and I will meet it with you all, come what may."

Jessie Reginald spoke in a tone that proved she would remain on deck, and a murmur of admiration arose to the lips of all who heard her words.

"Ha! there comes a gun from the Castle—bang!—whiz! and it has gone astern," gayly cried Reckless Ralph, his spirits seeming to rise with the increase of danger.

"They will improve by practice, I fear," dryly said Arthur Reginald; but he was perfectly cool, though very pale, for he dreaded harm to his beautiful sister.

"There rings the Castle's metal again! Merry music the guns make; but they fire wildly—they are excited," declared Ralph.

"And there goes our fore-topmast!" exclaimed Arthur Reginald, in a tone of dread of greater evil to follow.

"Plenty of spare spars aboard! Clear away that wreck, lads!" cried Ralph, and his reckless nature seemed to become more buoyant with the increase of danger.

The swift schooner, though shaken by the blow, was not checked, and flew on with greater speed, for the wind momentarily freshened, as though to aid the daring spirits who had risked so much.

But the rapid flight of the fugitive yacht, and its size alone, saved it from the batteries of the castle, which now opened fire with a will, and sent iron messengers of death ahead, astern, above and about the little vessel, which seemed to bear a charmed existence, for she soon left the castle half a mile astern, and continued her swift course along the island shores lying upon either side, and in a manner serving as a protection from the fire of the fort, now that darkness

was coming on, and rendering objects indistinct.

Still, on sped the yacht, and the spirits of all began to rise, though the fort yet kept up a rapid fire.

"Sail, ho!"

All started as the voice of Sylvester was heard, and every eye glanced astern, in the direction his gaze was turned.

"By Heaven! you are right; it is the cutter mermaid. She arrived in port last night, and the sloop has sent her in pursuit!"

"Is she fast, sir?" quietly asked Ralph.

"Very. She is said to be the swiftest schooner in these waters," answered Arthur Reginald.

"I doubt if she can overhaul this yacht; but she has one advantage."

"And that is?"

"Her guns. It will be a stern chase, and a raking fire. We are in greater danger now than we have been yet; *but we must not be taken.*"

Ralph said this with a determination which proved that he would hesitate at no ends to escape, and his crew seemed determined to support him; they were now his very slaves, so thoroughly had he gained the mastery over them.

The yacht was now running directly before the wind, wing and wing, and only a mile astern, the Mermaid, a six-gun cutter, was rushing swiftly in pursuit.

"Lieutenant, we draw less than the Mermaid; can we not run in between some of the islands and dodge her?" asked Ralph.

"I was thinking of a *ruse* to save us. The cutter will soon open with her guns, and she is running full as fast as we do."

"The tide is aflood, and there must be depth enough between the islands, for we draw not over six feet; besides, with the wind on her quarter the yacht sails better."

"We'll risk it; I'll put the helm up, and run for the islands," answered Arthur.

The foresail was at once jibed over to starboard; both tacks were hauled aboard; the stay-sail and jib drew together, and the schooner darted away on an oblique course, and, with the wind on her quarter, steered for a narrow channel that ran between two islands to the north and east.

Hardly had the sheets been hauled aft when a bright flash was visible, and a deep boom followed; then a solid shot rushed shrieking along and buried itself in the water at the very spot the yacht had changed her course.

"A crack shot that for the first one; the cutter's in practice from hunting smugglers on the Maine coast," said Arthur Reginald, quietly.

"They are firing at random. The flash

blinds them, and they do not notice our change of course," responded Ralph, lowering the glass from his eye, and watching the full sails as they drove the Flying Phantom swiftly along.

"The yacht sails better on a free wind, I see, and if we can hold our own five minutes longer we will be to windward of the Mermaid and have all our own way," remarked Arthur Reginald.

"See! they are giving up the chase! They are taking in the upper sails," cried Jessie, who had taken the glass from Ralph's hand.

"No, they are taking in their studding-sails to bring her to the wind, and continue pursuit; they see us now," coolly said Ralph.

"Then unless we can run the island channel we are lost," answered Arthur Reginald.

"But we can,—we *must*! we have not escaped thus far to be taken now," cried Jessie, earnestly.

"We will do all that we can, Jessie," answered Arthur, and then turning to Ralph, he continued:

"Let a man go forward and heave the lead, sir. I never ran this channel at night."

"What water?" cried Arthur.

"Twenty feet!" sung out Ralph, for he had taken the line himself.

"Eighteen feet!" came another cry from forward.

"It shoals rapidly; but we *must* stand on; it is our only hope," muttered Arthur to Sylvester, who aided him at the wheel.

And as he spoke another flash illumined the bows of the pursuing schooner, and another shot sped over their heads with ominous sound.

"Fifteen feet!" rung out again, yet in even tones.

"The tide is not as full as I supposed; but we must venture," again said Arthur, and in a voice too low for Jessie to catch his words.

"Twelve feet! and the channel narrowing!"

"Ay, ay, sir! Throw as rapidly as you can."

"Eleven feet!"

The excitement on the schooner was now intense. Every man held his breath in suspense. What would a few minutes more bring to them—death or safety?

"Only five feet between the keel and a rocky bottom," said Arthur calmly, though his heart was in a flutter.

"Ten feet! and the islands on either quarter!" cried Ralph, in the same unmoved tones.

"Nine feet! luff half a point to avoid a rock—steady now!" came again from the bows, the last words being almost lost from the roar of a shot overhead.

A silence like death now fell upon all on the yacht, for no one spoke; only the warning cry from Ralph was heard, calling out the rapidly lessening depth of the channel.

"Eight feet!"

Still Arthur Reginald stood on—his hands like iron clutching the wheel.

"Seven feet!"

"Good God! I *must* put back while I have time. Ready all!"

"*Nine feet!*" came the cry in the same unmoved tones; but they brought a burst of joy from all on board; in the nick of time the channel had deepened.

"Twenty feet!"

Another cheer from the crew, and a defiant yell at a solid shot that fell into the water a few fathoms astern, yet near enough to sprinkle spray upon them.

But the joy on the yacht was short-lived, for in startling tones came from forward:

"Nine feet!"

Every face blanched—the bar between the islands had not yet been passed over.

"*Seven feet! Ready about! Breakers ahead!*"

The ringing voice of Ralph caused all to spring at once to work, and Arthur Reginald answered calmly:

"Ready about it is!"

Swiftly the yacht swung round, while a grating noise was heard under her keel—another moment and the schooner would have been a wreck, her crew struggling for life.

"It is all up—we must surrender," calmly said Arthur Reginald, and Jessie gave a low moan of despair.

"You mistake, sir. I am not made of that kind of stuff. I will take the helm, please," and Ralph came aft.

"In God's name, what would you do, boy?"

"I will show you. Stand ready all to obey without a word!" sternly commanded the young commander, and he headed directly back toward the cutter, which, having beheld his maneuver, at once ceased firing.

The wind was now blowing a ten-knot breeze from the northwest, and its force sent the yacht through the waves with fearful velocity, her lee gunwales under water, while the schooner, approaching upon the opposite tack, lay over until her guns were useless.

Nearer and nearer the two boats approached to each other, until only a short space divided them, and in trumpet tones came the hail from the cutter:

"Yacht, ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" cried Ralph, in clear tones, while

he gradually edged to windward, so as to near the cutter on the weather bow.

"Pass astern, you accursed pirate, and round to under my lee, while I heave to, and send a boat aboard," rung out from the cutter.

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried Ralph, in pleasant tones; and then in a deep, stern voice, not loud enough to be heard except by his own crew, he said:

"Stand by to cast off the jib and fore sheet!"

Like an arrow from a bow the yacht shot past, while orders were heard in the cutter to lay the topsail to the mast, and bring her to the wind.

As the cutter's taffrail got abeam, Ralph gave his orders rapidly in low words to his crew.

"Ease off the jib, fore and main-sheet!"

As this order was obeyed, he put his helm up a point, and the yacht rushed on with increased velocity to what she had been running when close hauled, and the next moment, with a free sheet, the Flying Phantom was rushing away to leeward.

The confusion of laying to for a few moments prevented Ralph's bold act from being noticed by those on board the cutter; but then, when all expected to find the yacht under their quarter they beheld her flying from them like a race-horse.

A cry of mingled surprise and admiration at the bold maneuver burst from the crew, and curses of rage from the commander, who called in angry tones:

"Fire upon her! sink the pirate!"

But, laying to as was the schooner, no gun could be brought to bear upon the flying yacht.

"Let her wear round. As the guns bear upon the yacht, blow him out of the water!" yelled the irate commander, who felt that he had been thoroughly outwitted.

But the cutter took some time to wear round, and the yacht had gained a long start, so that the shots flew wild, and the beautiful craft escaped unhurt, while she rushed on, her lee-scuppers buried in the waves.

But the Mermaid at length got under way again, and with topmast studding-sails set crowded on in pursuit; but, carrying his canvas even under a reefing breeze, Ralph pressed on seaward.

"That was the boldest act I ever saw executed, sir. You are a born seaman," and Arthur Reginald held out his hand and grasped Ralph's, who returned, and in his usually even tones:

"It was our only chance, and reckless playing won the game. I will now relinquish the wheel to you, sir, and it now is a question of speed between the two vessels."

"A mile more and we will have gained the open sea; then we can run close inshore and dodge the cutter, where depth will not allow her to follow us."

"Then we shall easily escape. See, we are gaining rapidly upon the cutter, and her every shot at us but retards her progress," and Ralph turned his glass upon the pursuing vessel.

Thus half an hour passed; the schooner had gained the open sea and run inshore, out of range of the cutter's guns.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WEST-INDIAN PIRATE.

SWIFTLY to the southward flew the yacht, and after two weeks' run the shores of Cuba were sighted from her decks.

During the run Ralph had devoted himself wholly to the management of his vessel, and the training of his crew, in which duties he had been ably seconded by Arthur Reginald, to whom, with his sister, who had determined to accompany her brother to Cuba, the small, but luxuriantly furnished cabin had been assigned, while Ralph took up his quarters forward with his officers.

It was nearly sunset, when the Flying Phantom drew near the Cuban coast, and under a three-knot breeze headed for the home of the Cubans who were to be the witnesses for Arthur Reginald.

As the yacht glided slowly along near the romantic-looking shores, a large *drogher* suddenly dashed out from a lagoon, the mouth of which had not before been seen, owing to the dense foliage that overhung it.

The appearance of the *drogher* was peaceable enough, for it was one of those ungainly looking craft that are used on Cuban plantations, for transporting stores to and from the coast towns.

But, as the craft headed directly toward the yacht, and came on under all canvas, Arthur Reginald bent an earnest gaze upon it; and then his face paled, while he glanced quickly toward his sister, who sat upon a rug on the deck, idly contemplating the scenery.

Beckoning to Ralph to come to him, Arthur said, hastily:

"Captain Ralph, yonder *drogher* is a Cuban pirate!"

"Do you mean it?" asked Ralph, in surprise.

"I do. This part of the coast is very thinly settled, and its lagoons are the haunts of coast-pirates, who, in unsuspecting looking craft, rush out upon unsuspecting vessels. He is a pirate, I am confident, and we must fight him off, for capture by yonder

fellow means death to us all except my poor sister."

"He shall never take this vessel," said Ralph, firmly.

Then he added:

"I will at once prepare my men. I am glad we have plenty of small-arms on board."

"Yes, we are fortunate in that. See, the fellow steers so as to head us off."

"So he does. Now I will have the men quickly arm themselves, and then we will await the struggle. Will you get your sister into the cabin? The deck is no place for her now."

Arthur went to his sister, and in a few words told her of his suspicions regarding the *drogher*, and insisted that she should go into the cabin.

Jessie yielded reluctantly; she disliked to have her brother and Ralph face any danger she did not share; but she entered the cabin, and Arthur, arming himself, left her there.

Returning to the deck he found Ralph at the wheel, and the men all lying upon the deck armed for the fray and anxious to have a brush with the pirates. The romances they had read of buccaneers were going to be a reality to them, and they were eager for the trial, for they had perfect confidence in their boy-leader.

Without cannon on the yacht, they felt that the struggle would be more desperate, because hand to hand.

Meanwhile the *drogher* had approached within a quarter of a mile, and was sailing on a course that must bring the two vessels in collision, if one of them did not change.

On board the *drogher* but three men were visible—one at the huge helm, and two more idly gazing over the bulwarks toward the yacht, yet Arthur Reginald felt confident that two-score of desperate fellows, armed to the teeth, were hidden behind those oaken sides.

Nearer and nearer came the two vessels, until a cable's length only divided them, still neither changed its course; they must soon come together.

"Have you determined upon your plan of resistance, Captain Ralph?" asked Arthur Reginald quickly.

"My plan is to *attack* them—fight the devil, you know, with fire," returned Ralph, significantly. "Sylvester, pass the word forward for all to fire only at my order; and then rush upon the devils."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and a murmur of applause answered the order.

"How many men do you think that fellow has, Lieutenant Reginald?" asked Ralph.

"Perhaps fifty—and we are thirty-five, all told."

"Yes, I would have advised flight, but in this wind we could have been easily overhauled, for they carry heavy sweeps to aid them; besides, I thought that a bold front might keep them back; but that is a daring fellow; shall I hail him in Spanish?"

"Yes, do so, please."

"*Drogher* ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came back the answer in Spanish.

"Put your helm up or you'll be into us!" cried Arthur.

"That is my intention. . . Boarders ahoy!" cried a heavy voice, and the next moment the two vessels were broadside to broadside, colliding with only a slight shock.

Then over the high bulwarks of the *drogher* poured half a hundred fierce-looking men, cutlass and pistol in hand.

"Fire!" rung out in the clear tones of Reckless Ralph, and thirty-five pistols flashed together.

"At them, Flying Phantoms!" cried Ralph, as he sprung forward after the first volley, which had surprised the pirates, and killed a number of them.

"Yachtsmen ahoy! Beat them down! Show the pirate dogs no mercy!" rung out Arthur Reginald's inspiring words, and at once the fight became most deadly.

For a few moments the yachtsmen kept the pirates off of the schooner, and they hoped that they would continue to do so, but the buccaneers had been trained to desperate scenes—they had boarded a hundred vessels, and they fought with a greed for gold and blood, that made them as savage as brutes.

Hence, led on by a young, cruel-faced, yet handsome leader, they again made an attempt to board, and after a desperate struggle were successful, for they gained a footing upon the yacht's deck.

In vain did Ralph, Arthur and the crew of the Flying Phantom struggle. They were pressed back from the stern of their vessel, and driven forward by mere force of numbers.

As they reached the forecastle they made a determined stand, but the pirates, now double their number, pressed them back, and it seemed that the end had come, when a wild shriek rung out above the clash of steel and rattle of pistols.

For an instant the combat ceased, all spell-bound by that wild cry; then again arose the cry, and out of the cabin rushed the tall pirate leader, and in his arms he held the form of poor Jessie.

"Brother, Ralph, save me! Oh, save me!"

Maddened by what they saw, Arthur Reginald and Ralph sprung forward, and at their back were the yachtsmen.

Surprised, beaten back by this fierce rush, the pirates were unable to resist them, and in a panic turned and fled, fairly stunned by the fierce onslaught of their foes.

Rapidly they were driven over the yacht's bulwarks, and the yachtsmen were preparing to follow them; but, alas! too late—the two vessels swung apart, the heavy sweeps fell into the water, and the *drogher*, quickly moved away, leaving the Flying Phantom stationary, for a calm had fallen upon the sea.

In despair, Arthur Reginald would have followed in the yacht's boats; but that would have been madness, and Ralph held him back.

"Hold! Lose not your life by madness. Wait, and we will rescue her, or—*reveng. her.*"

"Yes, *that* is left if the other fails," answered Reginald, as he gazed earnestly upon the *drogher*, retreating rapidly shoreward, to hide in the lagoons along the coast, and bearing with her the beautiful Jessie, a captive to a cruel pirate chief.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAPTIVE.

IN the doorway of a log hut, overlooking the sea, and situated upon a foliage-clad hill, sat Jessie Reginald, a week after the attack upon the yacht by the pirates and their capture of the maiden.

The maiden was very pale, and her face was haggard, for she had suffered much since her capture, and dreaded the worst of evils.

After regaining the lagoon in his *drogher*, the pirate chief, Ramon, had taken Jessie to his stronghold on the hills above, and there placed her under the charge of an old negress, whom he threatened to kill if she escaped.

But how was Jessie to escape from that place—a pirate retreat, far from civilization, with unknown forests on one side, the sea on the other?

Still, Papita, the old negress, was determined she should not make the attempt, and watched her as a cat would watch a mouse.

As Jessie sat there in the cabin door, gazing sadly seaward, the old negress busied herself around, but always kept her eye upon the captive.

"Must my fate be as horrible as he has threatened? *a buccaneer's brúle!* The thought is terrible, and I would die by my own hand

first. Oh! that Arthur, or that brave youth, knew where I was! They would aid me—save me; but they are far away, and powerless, for many of the brave youths fell in defending the yacht.

"No, I have no hope—no hope!"

"Fair girl, you are too young to be hopeless."

Jessie uttered a half cry of fear, and turned quickly toward the speaker, who had approached unseen by her.

It was the pirate chief, a tall, well-formed man of twenty-seven or thirty—with a once handsome face, marred by a life of dissipation and crime.

Once an officer in the Spanish navy, he had descended the grade of honor, until he was driven to piracy upon the high seas.

Collecting a wild band of followers, he had established a piratical retreat upon the coast, and had been for several years, the terror of Cuban waters.

Such was his history, as told Jessie by the old negress.

"The young lose hope, senior, when they are situated as I am," replied Jessie, speaking in English, for the chief had addressed her in that tongue.

"You are young, and beautiful—you are—"

"A captive to a sea-thief and a murderer," interrupted Jessie, with sarcasm.

"Hard names, fair lady, to fall from your sweet lips. You are a captive, true, yet you have made my heart captive, for I love you."

"A pirate's love dishonors the one upon whom it is bestowed."

"Still severe, lady; but you forget that I should have some recompense; you are the only prize I won from the yacht, and it cost me a score of good men, killed to gain you."

"I sought for other property when I attacked you; but I am glad that, when beaten off by your defenders, who fought like devils, that I gained a prize that gold cannot buy. No, lady, I would not ransom you for a fortune. You have won my heart."

"And I could hate myself for drawing from you one word of praise. Oh, God! must I fall so low?"

The eyes of the chief flashed fire; but he said, quietly:

"Three days from this I come for my answer. You shall become my bride, or—" and he hesitated.

"Or what?"

"Or, the bride of death."

"I prefer the latter."

The chief turned away with a bitter curse; but he called back:

"In three days, remember!"

Jessie watched his retreating form until it was lost to sight beyond the hill. He had

gone back to his stronghold, where dwelt his men in their rude camps. The hut that Jessie was confined in was a resort that the chief often sought when desirous of getting away alone, sometimes, for conscience would often prick him with its sharp sting.

For some moments after the departure of the chief, Jessie sat like a statue—so cold, so white she looked.

At length she said earnestly:

"Papita, come here."

The old negress approached.

"You once lived with honorable people, I believe you said?"

"Yesh, missy, in old Mississippi."

"You were a good woman then, I believe?"

"I good 'oman, now, missy; I ain't do no wrong."

"You do; you keep me here when you know what my fate will be."

"Massa Ramon told me to do so."

"Do you love gold, Papita?"

"Yesh, missy."

"Well, listen to me, Papita. Aid me to escape from this Ramon, and I will give you a thousand dollars in gold—nay, go with me, and I will give you a happy home for life, and the gold too."

"Missy, I ain't a bad nigger. I was cotched on board a wessil and fatched here, two years ago, but I can't do it, honey; I can't do it."

"Why?"

"Bekase, chile, I is watched all de time. 'Sides, Ramon is de devil in disguise of a man, and he will follow me, he say, if I don't 'bey him."

"Nonsense! he is a devil, yes; but he is only a man."

"Missy, you don't know him. He kill me ef I help you. 'Sides, let me show you some-tin' you don't know."

Raising her voice, the old woman called out in Spanish:

"Diablos, come here!"

There was the sound of heavy feet, and from a thicket near by, emerged a huge African, fully seven feet in height, and with hideous features, and long, brawny arms and legs.

With his small, cruel eyes, he gazed earnestly upon Jessie, yet said nothing.

Addressing the giant negro in Spanish, the negress said:

"Diablos, we want some wine and provisions; go and bring them from the camp."

The giant glanced again at Jessie, and turned away.

"Dat prove we can't git away, missy, for dat fellow lie in de bushes day an' night to watch you an' me. I didn't tell you afore, 'kase I feared he mou't frighten you."

"But why can we not go *now*?" cried Jessie, doubly terrified now that she had seen the huge negro, who looked more like a demon than a human being.

"Why, missy, how we git away?"

"Run into the forest, and walk until we found aid. The negro will not be back for an hour."

"No, but he follow us when he come."

"But we will leave no trail. We can escape, Papita."

"No; we be cotched and tored to pieces. *Ramon would send bloodhounds arter us.*"

Jessie groaned and sunk back into her chair: her fate seemed sealed, and she lost all hope.

CHAPTER X.

A DEATH-STRUGGLE.

THE three days wound slowly away to poor Jessie, and each night, as she lay down upon her bed, she was tempted to take her own life; but she still held an atom of hope in her breast; she felt that perhaps her brother and Ralph were in some way trying to rescue her; and yet, the days dragged slowly away and they did not come.

It was the afternoon of the third day—the one appointed for her answer, and, haggard and frightened, Jessie sat in the hut door, her brain and breast throbbing with wild emotion.

Suddenly a shadow fell upon her, and she looked up with a thrill of horror and recognized Ramon, the Buccaneer Chief.

"Oh Heaven, have mercy upon me!" groaned the young girl, and the face of the chief darkened at her words.

He stood before her, silent and stern—his arms folded upon his breast, and truly a striking-looking man, attired as he was in a handsome naval uniform, with pistols in his silk sash, and a handsome sword suspended from his belt by gold chains.

"Girl, I have come for your answer," he said sternly.

"I will be the bride of death. Kill me, and I will forgive you," moaned Jessie.

"Am I so loathsome to you, then? Many women have sought my company in the past."

"Yes, but then you were a man of honor."

"I will again be a man of honor if I can win you, fair girl. I will banish my vile associates, leave this land, and live for you in another country, where you shall have all my love, my gold—"

"A pirate's love—a pirate's gold—bought with the blood of hundreds!"

"By Heaven! you are mad, girl; but I forgive you the words, if you will but be my

bride. I swear to you, fair lady, I will leave off my evil career—"

"You can never wash out the blood-stains on your hands—the crime-blots upon your heart."

"Curses on you, girl! Do you *dare* me?" almost shrieked the chief.

"Yes, I wish you to kill me," calmly answered the maiden.

For a few moments the chief paced angrily to and fro—his brow dark and threatening, his eyes glittering, and his teeth compressed.

Suddenly he halted.

"Again I ask you—will you be my bride, or will you die rather?"

"I will welcome death as my best friend, rather than degrade myself so low," said Jessie, with fearlessness and firmness.

"You shall have your wish, then—*Diablos!*"

A moment after the call, the giant negro stood before his chief, coming, as before, like a wild beast from his lair.

At sight of him Jessie's face became livid, and she trembled violently.

"*Diablos*, bear this maiden in those iron arms of yours down to the sea-shore. Swim out a mile from land, and there leave her to drown—do you hear?"

The negro bowed, and stepping forward seized the maiden in his strong arms.

One loud shriek of despair rung forth, and it was quickly followed by two names upon the maiden's lips—"Ralph! Arthur!"

Then Jessie swooned away.

Had they risen from the ground—those two at her call, that they appeared so suddenly upon the scene?

It would seem so; for the chief and his slave suddenly found themselves confronted by two forms armed and determined. Both he had met before, upon the deck of the yacht.

Quickly he drew a pistol and fired at the man nearest him—Arthur Reginald, but the bullet missed its mark.

The next instant the swords of the two men clashed and a deadly combat began. In the mean time the huge negro had turned upon Ralph, a long knife in his right hand, his left arm still holding the unconscious Jessie.

With fearless mien Ralph rushed upon him, and by a well-directed blow of his sword struck the knife from the giant's hand.

A cry of rage burst from the thick lips of the negro, and dropping Jessie on the ground he rushed savagely upon his boy foe.

But Ralph, reckless as was his nature, had no idea of allowing that giant to grapple with him, and leveling a pistol he fired.

The ball went true to its aim—pierced the black breast, while a yell of fury and anguish burst from the lips of the negro, who fell forward heavily.

But he sprung again to his feet, staggered forward, his eyes ablaze, his mouth sputtering forth foam and blood, and, in his dying agonies, would have been a powerful foe to meet, had not Ralph avoided his grasp, and driven his sword through and through him.

Another yell of rage resounded through the forest, and seizing the weapon the giant tore it from his body, broke it in pieces, and again rushed forward to grapple with his enemy.

Springing nimbly back, Ralph took deliberate aim and fired again.

A bullet went crashing through the huge skull, and down at last went the giant to his death, yet in his dying agonies tearing up the earth with his fingers, and to his last breath struggling in blind madness to reach his foe.

As the breath left the negro's body, Arthur Reginald struck the sword of Ramon from his grasp, and held the pirate at his mercy.

"You are the victor, senor; I crave my life," said the chief, and Arthur at once disarmed him of his pistols.

"Come, captain; we have no time to lose. The pirate's camps are near, doubtless, and your pistol-shots have alarmed them," cried Arthur.

"Yes, I disliked to fire, but was compelled to, to save my life from that mad devil. Your sister is still unconscious. You carry her and I will follow with this man."

"Will you take him along?" asked Arthur in surprise.

"Yes, he may be useful; it is the pirate chief; besides, I want him. But who have we here?"

"Only me, massa—a poor old nigger who wants to go wid you and de young missy," and Papita advanced from the hut, where she had remained, a most interested listener and looker-on of all that had happened.

"All right, old woman. Come, we must be off—hark! the pirates are aroused," and turning to the chief, Ralph continued:

"Walk before me, sir, and obey my every order. Disobey me and I will kill you."

The pirate knew the youth would keep his word, and moodily led the way down the hill toward the beach, closely followed by Reckless Ralph, cocked pistol in hand.

Behind them came Arthur Reginald, bearing the still unconscious Jessie in his arms, and old Papita brought up the rear; but from the camp came cries of alarm, and all knew they must hasten, did they desire to escape.

CHAPTER XI.

BLOODHOUNDS ON THE TRAIL.

HAVING gained the beach, the fugitive party turned to the left, and at a rapid pace ran along under the shelter of the bank and the overhanging foliage.

"This is a killing pace for you, Reginald; but I will relieve you when you are tired," said Ralph, for he saw that Jessie still remained unconscious.

"I can stand it for some distance further, but not to the boat; hal the pirates have reached the cabin and discovered that there is something wrong," replied Arthur, and as he spoke, there came to their ears the sound of loud cursing and excited conversation.

"Ha! What sound is that?" cried Ralph, suddenly.

"There is no mistaking those sounds, senors. My men are putting bloodhounds on your trail," remarked Ramon, the pirate chief, while his face turned a shade paler, for he knew well the nature of the terrible animals; he was as much in danger as his captors.

"Better run fast, for them dogs is de devil," cried old Papita, and she quickened her pace amazingly.

Then on they sped, Arthur seeming no longer to feel the weight upon him, and Ramon also eager to escape the dread evil that threatened them.

"It is yet a quarter of a mile to our boat. Push on, all, for yonder come the hounds," cried Ralph, and he pointed behind him to where were visible a dozen dark objects coming over the sandy beach, two-thirds of a mile away.

Still further back, was a motley crowd of men, hastening on in pursuit.

With an endurance and rapidity, that scarcely seemed human, the four runners still sped on, Jessie yet remaining lost to the danger of their situation.

On—on they went, and yet the savage hounds gained upon them at every bound.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the boat: but nearer and nearer the red-mouthed brutes drew to them.

At length the boat was but two hundred yards away, and was visible, lying in a lagoon that indented the shore; but the hounds were no further off, and would certainly overtake them.

Every one now felt that death was near to them—a horrible death—torn limb from limb by savage bloodhounds who loved the taste of human blood.

Suddenly Ralph cried:

"Push on, Reginald! Strain every nerve! May God forgive me for what I am going to

do; but your sister, you and I must not die such a death; the guilty must suffer."

Arthur Reginald glanced over his shoulder at Ralph's strange words; what could they mean?

Then the sight he beheld almost caused him to sicken and fall; but regaining his strength by a mighty effort, he set his teeth hard and rushed on with greater speed.

What Arthur Reginald saw was a struggle between two men—Ramon, the pirate chief, and Reckless Ralph.

It was a quick but deadly struggle, in which the two men went down together.

The next instant one of them bounded to his feet, and flew on like the wind in pursuit of those that had gone before.

The other man half-rose, fell back, writhed in agony, uttered one piercing shriek, and the bloodhounds were upon him.

Then followed savage growls, fierce yelps, human shrieks, and the mad brutes had killed their human prey—Ramon, the buccaneer; he who had condemned Jessie Reginald to death, only a short half-hour before, had been torn to pieces by his own bloodhounds.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

As terrible as the act seemed, to sacrifice the pirate chief, to permit the escape of his companions and himself, Ralph had not hesitated an instant after having made up his mind to the deed.

Knowing the nature of the bloodhounds on their trail, he felt that they would stop for a short time at the body of the pirate, and that would give them time, and a few seconds might save them.

When he turned upon Ramon, there was that in his eyes, that at once told the pirate what was his intention, and with the frenzy of a despairing man the chief fought for his life.

"Pirate, you must die! I will slay you, that your death may be less terrible," cried Ralph, and he sprung upon the chief, and after a short struggle, drove his knife into his bosom.

Then releasing himself by a mighty effort, from the dying clutches of the pirate, Ralph rushed on, and reached the boat to find Arthur Reginald utterly prostrated, lying beside his sister in the stern-sheets, while Papita, with straining eyes, had seized an oar, and, though panting for breath, was endeavoring to shove the boat off.

With a bound Ralph sprung aboard, and a few strokes of the oars sent the boat some distance from the beach.

Then, though livid with the horror he had passed through, trembling with excitement, and panting for breath, Ralph rowed with

strong strokes down the beach watching with a grim smile, the arrival of the blood-stained hounds at the water's-edge, and listening to the wild cries of their pursuers, as they saw the Americans escape from their clutches.

A row of a mile, and the boat came to a small inlet, in which lay the Flying Phantom at anchor, but with her sails spread.

"Get under way at once, Sylvester; we have no time to lose. I am dead beat, and Reginald is more dead than alive," said Ralph, in hoarse tones, as the boat ran alongside of the yacht.

But, willing hands now carried the party into the cabin, while Sylvester at once got the yacht under way, and before a stiff breeze the fleet vessel stood off from the coast, where her boy commander and crew had so nearly met a terrible death.

Half an hour after entering the cabin Ralph and Arthur had quite recovered from the effects of their hard run, and turned their attention to poor Jessie, who, under the care of Papita, was slowly regaining consciousness.

A few moments more and Jessie awoke to find herself in safety—no longer threatened with death.

It was a joyous meeting between the sister and brother, and Ralph left them to themselves, while he went on deck and headed the yacht once more for the part of the coast where Arthur wished to land and secure the witnesses who were to save him from death and dishonor.

When alone with his sister, for old Papita had gone to lie down, being almost used up, Arthur told her how Ralph had planned her rescue, and how they had gone together in the boat and endeavored to find out where she was held captive. They had arrived just in time to save her.

Then he made known their terrible race for life, and the horrible death of Ramon. "What a fearful retribution, and how horrible it must have been for Captain Ralph to sacrifice him," cried Jessie.

"Horrible indeed—he can never forget that scene, if he lives a hundred years. Jessie, that boy is the most remarkable being I ever saw. Why he has become what he is, I do not know; but it must have been some terrible wrong that drove him to be a sea-rover, and little less than a buccaneer!

"I fear he will yet become a pirate, Arthur, for, after taking us back to America, I feel confident he does not intend to cruise in an unarmed yacht."

"No, I fear for him; but I will do all I can to save him, and you must help me, sister."

Jessie promised, and the two went on

deck, and beheld the Cuban shores three leagues away; while the Flying Phantom was sailing swiftly down the coast under a heavy pressure of canvas.

The following morning the yacht came to anchor in a small bay, from which was visible above a distant forest, the white walls of a plantation home—the residence of Senora Valdos.

A boat was at once lowered, and Arthur Reginald and his sister were rowed ashore, Ralph declining an earnest entreaty to accompany them.

"Do not hurry yourself, Reginald; I can wait several days if need be," he called out as the boat rowed away.

Two hours after the boat returned, loaded down with wines, fruit, vegetables and fresh meats sent to Ralph and his crew by the Senora Valdos, and the coxswain handed the captain a note from Arthur, which said that in three days the mother and daughter would be ready to accompany them back to the United States, and begging that Ralph would, in the mean time, make his home on shore.

But Ralph was in no mood for meeting society; his thoughts, when not in busy action, were of a most gloomy nature. He had not forgotten the death by his hand, of poor Ned Rayford, his best friend; the prostrate form of Paul Presbury was ever before him too; the scene of his escape and fall of the constable, and the horrible death of the pirate chief—all these Ralph could not banish from his conscience; but he went ashore and dined that day at the mansion, and met the senora and her daughter, the beautiful Nita, who, with her mother, though knowing all about him that Arthur could tell, received him most kindly.

But refusing all entreaties to remain, Ralph returned that night to the yacht, and there remained until Arthur Reginald and his friends came on board.

When all was in readiness, the Flying Phantom spread her large white wings, and flew northward with her precious freight.

A run of three weeks, and one dark night the yacht glided boldly into New York harbor, from which she had escaped two months before.

With the recklessness habitual to him, Ralph fearlessly landed his passengers upon a dock on Hudson river, and then bade them farewell.

In vain was it that Jessie and Reginald, nay, and Senora Valdos and Nita, pleaded with him to give up his wild career, to disband his crew after returning his yacht to anchorage, and await quietly until the affair had blown over; he would not yield, though he longed ever so much to do so; but there

were reasons, sad, damnable reasons, why he could not return to a life of honor; he must ever be an outcast, he said bitterly, and bidding them farewell once more he sprung again on his deck, and decided and clear rung out his orders to his crew.

Five minutes after, Arthur and his friends beheld the Flying Phantom speeding away like a spirit craft, and well they knew, bound upon new adventures under its reckless boy commander.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD FORT.

WHEN the Flying Phantom had once more reached the open sea in safety, Reckless Ralph called his officers into his cabin, and made known to them his plans in a few terse words.

"You intended," he said, "to become smugglers, under the leadership of some broken-down naval officer, who knew, in collecting around him a crew of boys, he could mold them to his will better than he could so many men.

"Smuggling is doubtless an exciting life, but there is no glory in it. We want excitement, and I will tell you what is my intention—to arm and equip this vessel and go into the Carthaginian service."

"The Carthaginian cruisers are little better than pirates," said Sylvester.

"True, and we are little better than thieves, for we now have a stolen schooner, and if caught, would be hung."

"But where will you get your arms?" asked another officer.

"I will tell you. A year ago I passed a summer vacation cruising along the Maine coast with my father's yacht, and I discovered there an old fort, having in it a dozen guns in good preservation.

"The magazine near by was locked; but I found a key to open it, and discovered there was plenty of powder and balls, with half a dozen good gun-carriages, taken from a schooner-of-war wrecked there, some time before; there were also plenty of small-arms and all that we would need for a complete outfit for our vessel."

"Is there no one at the place?"

"A quarter of a mile away is a small village; but we can run in at night, and by morning can have our guns and munitions of war on board; then we can easily replenish our stores from the first unarmed ship we fall in with. How do you like my plan?"

And at once acquiesced, for they now had perfect confidence in Reckless Ralph.

"We need more men," said Sylvester. "We have only about twenty-five good for anything."

"True, I had thought of that, and determined to land you at Salem, and from there you can go to Boston, and get a dozen good boy sailors—then to New York, where you can get twice as many more, and there charter a vessel to bring you off Sandy Hook, where I will join you.

"I will give you funds for your expenses in Boston, and stage-fare to New York city. Can you do it?"

"Easily. I can get you fifty fine young fellows, if you wish them."

"No, forty will be enough, and we will then have a crew of sixty, not counting the officers."

Thus it was arranged, and the yacht headed northward, put Sylvester on a pilot-vessel off Salem three days afterward, and then continued on her way to the Maine coast.

It was a bright moonlight night when the Flying Phantom, with her young captain at the helm, stood slowly into the rock-bound bay that, in years gone by, had been guarded by the old fort situated upon a lofty hill overhanging the water.

"This is a bad-looking place, captain," said Mark Mandeville, glancing at the rugged reefs here and there rising above the water.

"Yes, but I anchored here for a week, and know pretty well how to steer. We can range alongside a rock at the base of the hill yonder, and lower the guns upon the yacht's deck."

Slowly, and under reduced sail the Flying Phantom glided on until she was within a cable's length of the rocky pier.

"Strip her of all sail, Mandeville. Then she will strike the rock with just force enough to break an egg. Steady now! There, we are moored alongside in splendid style. Make fast your hawsers, and then come up yonder pathway. I will go ahead."

So saying Ralph jumped ashore, and went rapidly up the rocky path leading to the fort above.

At length he stood alone in the ruined fortress, silently contemplating the deserted scene around him, all saddened by the mellow light of the moon.

"Ha! have you dared intrude upon my home?—the impious foot of man here—*here* to the retreat of one who would fly from his fellow-beings?"

The words were spoken in deep, earnest tones, and Ralph turned quickly, startled by the unexpected presence. Could the old fortress be inhabited?

One glance upon the speaker, and he felt that he stood in the presence of a madman—one whose reason had forever gone.

He was a man of large frame, with long

white hair and beard, and his form, muscular and powerful, was clad in rags.

In his hands he carried a heavy club, and in a leathern belt about his waist was an unsheathed knife.

"What would you, sir?" asked Ralph, kindly, and feeling pity for the madman.

"What would I? Why, cursed fool, it is for *me* to ask that question; you stand on *my* domain," almost shrieked the madman.

"I have come here for a purpose I intend to carry out; but I wish you no harm, so go and do not provoke me to use violent measures with you."

Ralph spoke in a mild, but firm voice, and yet that very mildness seemed to drive the maniac to frenzy.

"Leave here! or I'll hurl you from that cliff into the sea, and give your flesh to the fishes."

"Two can play at that game, old man, so I warn you to take my advice," coolly replied Ralph.

"Ha, ha, ha! A *boy* dare face me—*me*, the king of madmen. Boy, prepare to die."

With a bound the maniac sprang forward and leveled a blow at Ralph.

Skillfully the youth avoided the stroke, and feeling that he must act in self-defense, though anxious to avoid injury to the poor crazed being, he drew his sword and presented it threateningly, while he cried:

"Keep back, old man, or I'll kill you."

But he had miscalculated the lightning rapidity of the madman's movements, for, with the spring of a tiger, the maniac was upon him, the sword wrenched from his hands, broken, and the pieces hurled over the cliff, to fall with a loud ring, upon the yacht's deck, a hundred feet below.

Then in his powerful arms, the maniac raised the youth, and with a demoniacal laugh started toward the cliff with his burden.

But only a few steps had he taken when there came a flash, a report, and with a groan, the madman fell, dragging with him to the earth his foe, and not ten paces from the edge of the cliff.

"He brought it upon himself. I hated to kill him," said Ralph, as he endeavored to free himself from the death-clutch of the maniac.

But in vain his effort—he was in a grasp of iron, and in a situation terrible in the extreme.

At that moment Mark Mandeville and the crew, alarmed by the fall of the pieces of sword upon the deck, and the ring of the pistol-shot, arrived upon the scene, and Ralph was released from the death-hold of the maniac.

"Here, boys, hurl him into the sea!" cried Mark.

"Hold! you will do nothing of the kind. He is a poor madman, and shall receive decent burial. Bury him yonder in the shadow of that tree," and Ralph marked out the spot.

The madman was now placed beneath the ground, and then the crew went to work in earnest, and commenced to remove the dismounted guns.

They were of different sizes, brass twelve-pounders, and long iron eighteens and thirty-twos.

Out of the lot Ralph selected a thirty-two-pounder for the yacht's forecastle, a long eighteen for the stern, and four brass twelves for amidship, giving him a splendid battery of six guns.

The cannon were lowered by means of ropes and chains to the deck of the schooner, and then the crew returned to obtain the gun-carriages and ammunition from the magazine, which was in a distant corner of the fort, and where Ralph had already gone to break in the door.

"Ho! Phantoms to the rescue!" suddenly rung out in the clear tones of the young captain, and rushing forward at his call, the crew came upon a startling scene.

Against the door of the magazine stood Reckless Ralph at bay, a pistol in one hand, a sword—which he had taken from Calvin Conrad—in the other, and confronting him were a dozen men attired in sailor garb, and armed with cutlasses and pistols.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COMBAT WITH SMUGGLERS.

"Hold! if you come on I will slay your officer!"

The crew of the yacht halted at once, for the speaker's voice was determined, and they felt that Ralph's life was in deadly danger.

"What would you?" asked Ralph, in calm tones, still standing at bay, with sword and pistol ready.

"That is soon told. You seek to make us your prisoners, and have dogged us here. Young man, you are in a trap," said the former speaker, and who seemed to be the leader of the party.

"You speak in enigmas. I knew not there was any one in the fort," replied Ralph.

"Then why are you here, if not to dog us?"

"That is none of your business. We came upon a duty which your presence here shall not prevent us carrying out," firmly replied the youth.

The man he addressed seemed puzzled. There was some mystery in the matter he could not solve; but he said at length:

"Do you not belong to the United States cutter, *Sea Serpent*?"

"No; I am not in the United States service."

"Ha! then you are not Revenue officers, as I feared?"

"No."

"What are you, then?"

"Sailors who landed here three hours ago from a schooner now lying under the cliff. Now, who are you?"

"Answer me just one question—are you buccaneers?"

"We are men who sail where we please, and owe no allegiance to any flag. Now, stand back, for I would get into that magazine!"

"Ha! you are pirates, then, and have landed here for powder and ball. You are worse than we are; *we* cheat the Government out of a little duty—you spill blood to gain gold!"

"You are smugglers, then?" said Ralph, struck by the bold air of the man.

"Yes; won't you join us? We need a good vessel and more men."

"Thank you; we have other ends in view than stealing silks and laces."

"Cutting throats, for instance," sneered the smuggler leader.

"Yes, if interfered with. If you value your life, you had better stand aside—we have no time to parley."

The man turned and conversed with his followers for a moment in a low tone, and then said to Ralph:

"You are a bold young fellow for one in so tight a place as you are; but where is your captain?"

"I am my own master."

"What! a *boy*?"

"Yes, a *boy*, if so you wish it."

"You command the schooner?"

"Yes."

"Where is your vessel now?"

"Lying under the cliff."

"How many men have you?"

"Not one, if years are the test of manhood; all *boys* like myself."

"Well, how many *boys* have you?"

"Enough to thwart any little game *you* would like to play against us," said Ralph, quietly.

"How large is your schooner?"

"A hundred tons, and the swiftest craft afloat, as we have had cause to know."

"Good! The very craft for our work. You see, we lost our vessel a few weeks ago—had to burn her to prevent Uncle Sam's boys from taking her, and we want just such

a vessel as you have, so we will not quarrel, will we?"

"That depends."

"Well, my young gentleman, my head is older than yours, and I propose that we unite forces. I will be captain, and you my first lieutenant; then we can carry on a trade here on this coast that will enrich us all in a year's time. What say you?"

"That I will not listen to your proposal. I command my own vessel, and we need no aid from smugglers. Stand back now, for you are delaying us."

The smuggler held another whispered conversation with his men, and then said, menacingly:

"My fine fellow, I offered you fair terms, and you refused them; now, we will take your schooner and leave you ashore."

They were the last words the smuggler ever uttered, for Reckless Ralph had felt that a crisis was coming, and prompt to act, he quickly raised his pistol and fired full in the man's face.

Without a groan the smuggler fell dead, while with a bound Ralph was in the midst of the surprised gang of outlaws, and a desperate combat began, for Mark Mandeville and the yacht's crew rushed at once to the aid of their captain.

Cutting his way through his enemies, Ralph placed himself at the head of his men and rushed upon the smugglers, who fought only on the defensive, so great was their surprise at the sudden turn affairs had taken.

Demoralized by the loss of their leader, and outnumbered by the yacht's crew, who fought like devils, the smugglers ran from the field, leaving half of their number dead and dying in front of the magazine.

"We have lost several good men; but this is no time to mourn; so smash open that door and let us get out the gun-carriages and powder. My left arm is wounded, so I can only do half a man's work. At it, lads, at it with a will! Throw those dead out of the way."

Thus encouraged by their young commander, whom no danger could daunt or obstacle overcome, the crew went to work in earnest; the magazine door was broken in, and the gun-carriages selected and hastily run out to the edge of the cliff.

Large quantities of ammunition were then carried to the cliff, and all hands set to work to lower the prizes to the schooner's deck; but, ere the work was completed, the moonlight paled and daylight came.

Still the crew worked on, and at length the last keg of powder and bag of balls was on the deck; and not a moment too soon, for up the hillside, from landward, came a large crowd of men, armed and ready for the

fray. The villagers near by had learned of the yacht's presence and were coming to attack the robbers of their fort.

"Cut away that head-line, and let her swing round! There; now run up the top-sails! Now she feels the breeze. Mandeville, turn half a dozen muskets upon that land party, as soon as they appear, or they will pick us off with their rifles!"

Quickly the orders of Ralph were obeyed, and as the schooner swung round, caught the morning breeze, blowing fresh, and headed out of the bay, the villagers reached the cliff, and at once opened fire.

But a volley of musketry quickly drove them to shelter, and ere they rallied for another fire, the Flying Phantom was out of range, and with her decks lumbered with cannon, gun-carriages, ammunition, and a few wounded youths, was dashing swiftly seaward, all on board rejoicing at the success of their expedition, their lucky escape, and the crew more than ever impressed with the skill and courage of their boy leader.

CHAPTER XV. THE TRAITOR.

"SAIL ho!"

The cry rung out clear and loud from the foremast-head of the Flying Phantom, one pleasant afternoon a few weeks after the raid on the old fort, on the coast of Maine.

"Whereaway?" called out Reckless Ralph, who just then came on deck.

"Dead ahead, sir."

"What course is she steering, and what's her rig?"

"Bearing down toward us, sir—a lubberly-looking schooner, from the looks of her top-hamper."

"Mr. Mandeville," and Ralph turned to his young lieutenant, "that may or may not be Sylvester. If it is, good; if not, I will bring the craft to, anyhow, for we must have provisions. We have ample provender for the guns, but we want some for ourselves; so clear the bow gun to bring him to."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and Mark gave the necessary orders, while Ralph gazed admiringly over his new-armed schooner, for the guns had been well-mounted, and everything was in its place, while the crew were most anxious to have a brush of some kind with an enemy.

Nearer and nearer the vessels approached, and as they drew close together, a large white flag fluttered up to the peak of the stranger, whose bows seemed crowded with men.

"Sylvester, as I live! Now we are all right. Helmsman, luff so that he can lay to under our lee," cried Ralph, his face flushing, and eyes glistening with joy.

Ten minutes more and the vessels were laying to, and a boat was coming on board the yacht.

"Sylvester, I am glad to see you, old fellow; you are indeed welcome," and Ralph grasped the hand of his returned lieutenant, who answered;

"And I am glad to get back, I assure you, captain, for our running off with the yacht has created a devil of a stir, and the Government has sent out vessels to capture us, and with orders to hang every one on board."

"Indeed! Then we are considered pirates?" said Ralph, quickly.

"Yes, and there was so much excitement about it, that I had to work with the greatest caution; but I got sixty men."

"More than we wanted, Sylvester."

"Not if we are to be treated as pirates."

"No! You are right. Are they all young?"

"Not a twenty-one year old in the party, and more, I brought them all well-armed and with the balance of the money you gave me bought provisions."

"Sylvester, you are a trump! We will run in under the lee of the land, as soon as it is dark, and make the transfer, and let your skipper return."

"Yes, sir, for he is anxious to get back; but I have a prisoner for you."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes, Rupert Vane."

"The yacht's boatswain? Why, he was killed by smugglers the night we got our guns on board," said Ralph, with surprise.

"Then he has come to life again; but I will explain. One of my men is a deserter from the navy, a cabin boy, and he states that a man by the name of Rupert Vane came on board his vessel, and told the commodore that he had escaped from the Fugitive Yacht, for that is the name by which our vessel is known now."

"Well, he told him we had run off with her, gave your name, which he had found on an old letter which he had seen addressed to you, and made known the whole affair, up to your visiting the fort in Maine."

"He also stated that I was ashore recruiting men, and that we had determined to turn pirates; and, not caring to be hung, he had deserted at the fort, warned the villagers near by, and led them to attack you; but that you had escaped, and he had then come on to New York to make known to the commodore all that had happened."

"This is a strange story, indeed. We missed the fellow, and believed we had left him dead in the fort; but you have him, you say?"

"Yes, sir; and I'll tell you how I got him: The commander, it seems, came on shore, bringing the cabin-boy with him to bear to the ship some message, and after going to the hotel, dispatched the young fellow back to the vessel; but, instead of going, he chose that time to desert and come to me, for he had already promised to come as soon as he could get away."

"Then he told me all that had occurred and I determined to get hold of the traitor, and at once concocted a plan."

"The cabin-boy had a letter to the first lieutenant, and this I opened, and being a natural forger, I added a 'P. S.,' asking that Rupert Vane be at once allowed to return with the cabin-boy back to town, as the commodore wished to see him there."

"The youth immediately returned on board ship, and one hour after I had Rupert Vane in my power, and he is now in irons on board, for I brought him out for trial."

"He needs no trial. I will at once pass sentence upon him. *To-morrow, at sunrise, he dies!*" and Sylvester knew that his captain meant what he said.

At the first shadow of night, Ralph ran in under the lee of the land, for there was an off-shore breeze, and the schooner was soon lashed alongside of the yacht.

Two hours' time, and the transfer of men and stores was made, the skipper was paid, for when he sent Sylvester ashore, Ralph had given him an order upon his banker for a large sum he had deposited there.

Then the two vessels parted, the one heading back to New York, the other bound upon a lawless cruise upon the high seas.

As soon as the men came on board, Ralph called them before him, and, in a neat little speech, told them they had come to serve under a flag that was at war with all mankind—a flag that should be hoisted to the yacht's peak at sunrise.

Then he assigned the crew to their different posts of duty, and entering the cabin, retired.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EXECUTION AT SEA.

WHEN the morning came a dead calm rested upon the sea, and the Flying Phantom lay upon the waters, her sails flapping idly.

As the eastern sky grew rosy, Ralph came on deck. Immediately the roll of a drum resounded through the vessel, and the crew ranged themselves in line, while six lads, armed with muskets, took their position further forward. The boy captain and his officers occupied the quarter-deck.

"Bring forth the prisoner!" was Ralph's calm order, and a moment after two guards brought Rupert Vane from below, and placed him upon the fore-castle—ten paces from his executioners.

Every eye turned upon the doomed boy, and his face flushed and paled by turns. He felt that perhaps there was some hope for him, even though he had been a traitor to his comrades.

"Is all in readiness?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied Mark Mandeville.

Ralph then took a roll of bunting from beneath his arm, and attaching it to the peak halliards, said, in a voice that all heard:

"Lads, I had made in New York the private colors of our vessel. I will now hoist it to the peak, and our first act under it will be to punish by death, one who has been a traitor to his ship and shipmates."

"Mercy! oh, mercy!" groaned Rupert Vane.

But, as though he did not hear him, Ralph ran the flag up to the peak, where a passing breath of wind wafted it open, and a large black field, and red band, with the index finger pointing onward, stood revealed.

A wild cheer burst from the crew—a greeting to their new flag under which they recklessly cast their fortunes.

"Proceed with the execution!" commanded Ralph, turning toward his officers and Mark Mandeville stepped forward and gave the order to the executioners to be in readiness.

"For the love of God! have mercy! Captain Ralph, spare my life and I will be your slave. Boys, beg for me. Oh! beg for me."

But not a lip moved, and every eye turned toward the stern boy commander.

His face was unyielding; his eyes had no

mercy for the traitor; his lips were firm, his face as pale as the doomed lad's.

"Is all in readiness, Mr. Mandeville?"

"Yes, sir."

"Attention!" called out Ralph, and the executioners faced the prisoner.

"Aim at his breast. I wish no bungling work. Ready! aim! Fire!"

Like one gun the muskets flashed, and Rupert Vane, the traitor, was dead.

"Throw that body into the sea! Ha! here comes a breeze. Now we will carve our fortunes under yon inky colors!" and Reckless Ralph turned to enter his cabin.

"Sail, ho!"

Every heart bounded at the sound, and in cheery tones Ralph called out:

"Where is she, lookout?"

"Three points off the port bow, sir."

"What do you make her out?"

"A large clipper ship, sir. She looks like a New York and Havana packet."

"Good! She will have on board all that we want. How does she head?"

"She is steaming northward, sir."

A half-hour passed, and the strange sail was visible from the decks of the yacht; and in an hour more but a league divided the two vessels.

Then the stranger seemed to discover something suspicious-looking in this yacht, for she suddenly squared her yards and ran away dead before the wind.

"Ha! that's her game, is it? Well, we'll show her that the Phantom can sail before the wind, too. Throw her wings out on either quarter, Mr. Mandeville, and let the ship see that we mean *business*," ordered Ralph.

It now became a stern-chase, and dead before the wind; but it was soon evident that, though the clipper ship spread every inch of canvas that would draw, the yacht was rapidly overhauling her.

Finding that her pursuer seemed to sail so well before the wind, the clipper changed his course, and with the wind on his quarter, rushed through the water with increased speed.

But the yacht seemed to sail even better on this tack, and all on board the ship felt that their vessel was doomed.

"Give him a shot from the thirty-two, Mr. Conrad! Pitch the iron near enough to him to show that we are in earnest; and, Mr. Mandeville, have the crew come to quarters. That fellow's size indicates a number of men on board."

The long thirty-two then burst forth—its maiden-shot upon a peaceful craft, and the iron messenger plowed up the sea just under the bows of the clipper ship.

"Give him another, Mr. Conrad, and fire at him; he does not take a hint."

Again the long gun belched forth in anger, and the shot, well-aimed, cut away the ship's fore-topmast.

At once the stranger came up into the wind and lay to; and running under her lee, Ralph hailed:

"Ahoy, the clipper ship!"

"Ahoy, the schooner!" came in a gruff voice from the stranger.

"What ship is that?"

"The Dart, from Havana to New York. What schooner is that?"

"The Fugitive Yacht."

"Are you a pirate?"

"Yes, if so you wish it; but make no resistance, and I will do you no other harm than to relieve you of a portion of your cargo."

Ten minutes after Ralph was on his way, in a six-oared cutter and with six men armed with muskets, to board the ship.

Whether the yacht's high bulwarks concealed most of her crew, or not, it was hard to tell; but the ship's captain, with thirty men to back him, and a score of male passengers, suddenly determined upon resistance, and as Ralph reached the deck, he was met by a volley of musketry, that wounded him slightly and killed three of his men.

Then the tiger in his nature was aroused; and springing upon the ship's deck, he called upon his men to follow him.

Instantly a hot fight began, which Ralph soon saw would result in his defeat if he did not call to the yacht for aid.

But, there was no need for this, as he suddenly saw the tall masts of the yacht swerving, and he knew that Mark Mandeville was coming to the rescue.

Just as the ship's crew had driven Ralph and his small band to the fore-castle, the sharp bowsprit of the yacht ran up over the bulwarks of the merchantman. Quickly two score of lads threw themselves upon the decks, and, led on by Mark Mandeville, rushed to the rescue.

Seeing the numbers that came against them, the defenders of the ship threw down their arms and cried for quarter; but the blood was up, and a number were cut down ere Ralph's loud orders to spare them were obeyed.

At last the carnage ceased, and Ralph began to see what his prize was worth to him; but hardly had the removal of stores begun when a warning cry came from the schooner.

"Sail, ho!"

Instantly Ralph sprung into the main-shrouds of the ship, and turned his glass upon the strange sail.

"An armed vessel, by all that's holy! A brigantine, sailing like a witch, and carrying a dozen guns. On board the yacht, all of you!" cried Ralph, and then turning to the ship's commander, he continued:

"You have to thank that vessel, sir, for a lucky escape. If yonder fellow wishes to know who I am, say you were boarded by Reckless Ralph, of the Fugitive Yacht."

Bounding on board his vessel, Ralph gave the order to cast loose. The yacht's sail caught the wind, and away went the fleet vessel across the waves.

And just in time, for, when clear of the ship, the brigantine at once opened fire upon the yacht, and spread on all sail in pursuit.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

WITH a fair breeze, the Fugitive Yacht left the brigantine astern, for the vessel-of-war stopped for a while at the clipper ship, and then, though sailing well, was distanced by the fleet

yacht, who dodged her in the darkness of the following night.

From that day the yacht became a pirate, for, openly upon the high seas had the boy buccaneers brought to a merchant-vessel, and this act had stamped the vessel as a freebooter.

But Ralph was now thoroughly reckless of consequences, and with his conscience goading him on he reveled only in scenes of excitement, and flew over the seas a terror to the merchant-vessels, hunted down by the navies of the world, for no flag escaped him.

With a craft that sailed like the wind, and a crew of reckless spirits like his own, Ralph defied all vessels sent in pursuit of him; but there was one that dogged him untiringly—the brigantine that had driven him away from his first act of piracy on the high seas.

That vessel, trim, well-armed, and a swift sailer, seemed to be ever on the trail of the Fugitive Yacht, and hunted the buccaneer over all seas with a perseverance that was remarkable, an energy that was untiring.

One afternoon, a year after the Fugitive Yacht hoisted the pirate flag two vessels were cruising slowly along the far southern coast, and heading more and more inshore.

The one, more than a league in advance, was the Fugitive Yacht, carrying all the canvas that would draw in the light breeze then blowing.

The other was the brigantine before referred to, and a fine-looking craft she was, of three hundred tons burden, raking spars, and a graceful hull, upon which was a heavy battery of guns.

Having increased the distance that divided them to four miles, the yacht put her helm up, and stood suddenly inshore.

As she neared the land an inlet was visible ahead, and taking the helm himself, Ralph steered boldly through the winding channel into a small bay.

Standing across this sheet of water, the yacht entered a lagoon, which led into a perfect network of bayous.

Reckless Ralph headed his vessel directly into the midst of the overhanging forest, and then came to anchor.

"Here we are safe. The brigantine may feel her way into the bay, but it will take her a week to find us here. Mr. Sylvester, I will go ashore in the gig, and *alone*."

"Ashore! this looks like all swamp land," said the lieutenant.

"And so it is, here; but a mile distant the highlands begin, and there are a number of plantations on this neck. I know this spot well, Sylvester, for I was born a few miles from here."

"Indeed! And do you intend returning home? Remember, captain, you risk your life!"

"I do that every day. Yes, I wish to see the old place, and know if—if my parents, and—friends are still alive."

Ralph spoke with considerable feeling, and the gig being alongside, he sprung into it, after arming himself thoroughly.

"If the brigantine comes into the bay, Sylvester, get the boats ahead, and tow up the bayou until you come to where it spreads into an inland lake. There wait my return."

So saying, Ralph rowed rapidly up the bayou.

After a row of several miles he came to a range of highlands, upon which was visible a lordly plantation home, with rows of negro cabins half a mile away.

But upon all was an air of neglect, as though the place was deserted.

Landing from his boat, Ralph walked swiftly forward and entered a large flower-garden overgrown with weeds, and here and there ornamented with a rustic arbor.

"My God! can my parents no longer live here! The place seems a ruin," he murmured; but, with white face he continued on his way until he came to a huge willow tree.

Beneath it were a dozen white marble slabs, the monuments of the dead, for he stood in the family burying-ground of the Roys.

"Here I can learn, perhaps, all I would know."

Sadly he approached the sacred spot, glanced hastily over the different marble slabs familiar to him, and then stood before two newly-made graves—the marble yet bright and clear.

One glance at the names thereon, and he sunk upon his knees, groaning:

"Great God! they are dead, and *I have killed them!*"

With head bowed down for some time, in very agony of spirit the youth remained.

Then he said sadly, while his form trembled with emotion:

"Two years ago I left home a happy boy. I left those here who loved me; now I return to find my home deserted, and my parents dead. Yes, dead, and I have placed them here, for it broke their hearts to know their boy was a pirate. Oh God! how guilty I am—the blood of my best friend, poor Ned Rayford, upon my hands—the lives of Paul Presbury and Sandy Ross to answer for—ha! I must not count—the list is too long—it will drive me mad to recall my deeds of crime; but here lies my foulest deed; my parents died because I broke their hearts by becoming a pirate."

"You speak the truth, Ralph Roy."

With a bound the young buccaneer was upon his feet, his sword in hand.

Before him, and a few paces distant, stood a tall form, his arms folded upon his breast.

"Great God! are you risen from the dead, Paul Presbury?"

"I do not believe in spirits, yet God knows your presence here haunts me as from the grave—speak! are you Paul Presbury in flesh and blood, or are you from the spirit land?" and Reckless Ralph gazed with wild eyes and heaving chest upon the man before him—he whom he believed he had placed in his grave.

"I am no ghost, Ralph Roy, but no thanks to you that I am not; but I recovered from the wound you gave me—"

"Oh, God, I thank Thee! His death does not bow down my heart. Paul Presbury, I thank you; your blood is not on my hands."

"It should matter little, I think, to one whose crimes are upon every tongue," sneered Paul.

"Ha! you know me then."

"As Reckless Ralph, the commander of the Fugitive Yacht Buccaneer, you are well known, Sir Pirate."

"Hold! hurl no insults at me; but tell me, did my wicked deeds kill my parents?"

"Yes, your father committed suicide when he heard of your killing Ned Rayford, and wounding myself and the constable, Sandy Ross—"

"Wounding Sandy Ross! Is he not dead then?"

"No; he lives; his wound was severe, but not fatal."

"Again I thank Thee, oh God!" fervently said Ralph, and then he continued:

"My father committed suicide, you say?"

"Yes, and your mother soon after died of a broken heart; then the place went to ruin, for your father was largely involved, it seems," said Paul Presbury, with an air of pleasure at being able to inflict all the pain he could upon the poor youth.

"And Clare, where is Clare Rayford?" asked Ralph, hesitatingly.

"She is in a convent in New Orleans; your crimes led her to hide herself from the world. Is there aught else you would know, Sir Pirate?"

Ralph stood with bowed head for some moments, utterly crushed by the ill-tidings he had heard.

Then, suddenly raising his eyes, he said:

"Yes, I would know why *you* are here. Your home is far away, and what right have you to gloat over my misery here at this sacred spot?"

"The right of ownership, my pirate friend. I bought this plantation a week ago, and here is to be my home, and Sandy Ross is to be my overseer. He will be along soon, as he stopped to talk to a planter he met as we came along the highway."

"You own this place—the home of my boyhood, Paul Presbury?" said Ralph, in deep tones.

"Yes, and as I do not like your name continually staring me in the face, I will remove these old bones lying here to some other spot; it destroys the beauty of the garden to have graves in it."

"Paul Presbury, my delight at not having your life to answer for alone prevents me from killing you where you stand. Leave here, this instant, sir, for I would be alone with my dead."

"Ha, ha! Do you think, when I have it in my power to take Reckless Ralph, the terror of the seas, that I will let the chance go by?"

"No, you mistake, Sir Buccaneer; *you* are my prisoner!"

As Paul Presbury spoke, he drew a pistol from his breast pocket and leveled it at Ralph.

But Reckless Ralph had faced too many dangers to be afraid of a pistol-muzzle, and he sprung forward toward his foe, who instantly pulled the trigger.

The bullet cut a deep gash in Ralph's shoulder, but did not even stagger him, and before Paul Presbury could fire a second shot, the buccaneer was upon him.

An instant he hesitated; he seemed inclined to spare his enemy's life; but just then came up, alarmed by the shot, his old foe, Sandy Ross, the ex-constable.

Instantly the knife in Ralph's hand descend-

ed with terrible force, and the keen blade sunk deep into the breast of Paul Presbury.

Releasing his clutch upon Paul Presbury's throat, Ralph hurled the dead body from him, and turned upon Sandy Ross, who was rushing upon him, knife in hand.

"Ha! Reckless Ralph, the pirate! we have met again, have we? Well, I'll wipe out our old score, and get the reward offered for the head of the cruel commander of the Fugitive Yacht."

Sandy Ross spoke confidently, and stood gazing at the youth before him, who coolly returned:

"If you value your life, Sandy Ross, leave here! *You know me.*"

Maddened by the remembrance of Ralph's former triumph over him, and excited by the hope of a large reward, Sandy Ross rushed upon the youth.

There was a clash of steel, as Ralph's sword met the knife of his assailant, a thrust, and the blade of the buccaneer pierced through and through the body of the unfortunate man.

With a groan of anguish Sandy Ross fell dead. A few moments before Ralph had rejoiced that these men yet lived, and he was not guilty of their death; now that dream of joy was gone, for they both lay dead at his feet, slain by his hand.

Calmly he stood gazing upon them, and then turned sadly toward the graves of his parents.

But his sorrowful thoughts were suddenly broken into by the deep boom of a gun in the direction of the yacht.

Quickly kneeling down he bent over until his forehead touched the grave of his mother, and his lips parted in a low prayer for forgiveness.

Then he sprung to his feet and ran rapidly down to the shore where he had left his boat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VALUABLE PRIZE.

WITH rapid strokes Ralph made his little gig fly on its way back to the yacht, for the sound of heavy firing constantly came to his ears, and he feared the brigantine had in some way penetrated into the lagoon and attacked his vessel.

But he soon came in sight of the yacht; lying quietly at anchor, and as he sprung on deck, he met Calvin Conrad, who had just returned in a boat from a reconnoitering expedition.

"What is it, Conrad?" he asked, eagerly.

"Why, an English cruiser chased and captured an American merchantman, and is now in pursuit of the brigantine, which stood out of the bay, as if to attempt the rescue of the prize; but our little foe found the Englishman double her size, and has had to show her heels."

"This is a proof that the war has begun between the United States and Great Britain. How far off is the prize, Conrad?"

"A league from the shore, sir, and heading southward slowly, doubtless making for Kingston with a prize crew on board."

"Then I'll take her away from the Englishman! Up with that anchor, lads, and get the boats ahead to tow out of this."

The crew sprung nimbly to work, and twenty minutes after the yacht was tacking across the bay, and in an hour's time was in the open sea.

Two leagues to the southward the merchant vessel, a large, full-rigged ship, was visible, sailing slowly along, under mizzen and main jury masts, for her brave captain had stood on until the Englishman's fire had threatened to sink him.

Far away to the westward was visible the brigantine and a league astern of her the English cruiser in full pursuit.

Instantly Ralph crowded on sail in chase of the prize, and just at sundown sent a shot after her.

But the English midshipman, who had been placed in command, had a crew of twenty men, and was determined not to surrender to a pirate without a fight.

Releasing the American seamen, eighteen in number, he urged them to aid him in the defense of the vessel against a buccaneer, which the ship's captain agreed to do if the Englishman would give him back his craft after he had removed the cargo.

The midshipman promised to do as he wished, and with a few passengers to aid him, also, which gave him a crew all told, of fifty men, he set about preparation to defend his prize.

From the hold four twelve-pounder field-guns were brought on deck, for the vessel was loaded with arms and ammunition, and port-holes were quickly sawed in the stanch bulwarks.

During the preparations the yacht came rapidly on astern, and soon fired a shot over the ship.

But the midshipman stood on, and refused to heave to, even though the yacht was firing rapidly upon him.

"Now he is near enough—luff her, helmsman—fire!" cried the plucky midshipman, and as the ship brought her broadside to bear upon the schooner, the four twelve-pounders were discharged with a raking fire.

The yacht staggered under the shock; it was wholly unexpected, and a dozen men went down killed and wounded.

Ralph was aroused in his rage, but perfectly cool and loud rung his orders to lay his schooner aboard the ship.

"Boarders, ahoy! follow me!" he cried as the sharp bows of the yacht went over the stern of the prize.

"Boarders to repel boarders! Beat the pirates back! Men, we all fight for our lives!" cried the brave English midshipman, and he confronted Reckless Ralph.

Instantly their swords met, and a fierce combat began.

The Englishman had learned to fence from a master of the art, but Ralph had not only taken lessons early in life, but had been made an expert from hard and cruel experience on many a bloody deck, and quickly cut the midshipman down.

"Drive them forward, lads! At them, you Boy Buccaneers!" shouted Ralph, and the American and English defenders of the ship were driven forward with savage fury, and cries for quarter went up on all sides.

"The man who strikes a suppliant for mercy, I will slay," cried Ralph. Instantly the carnage ceased. His crew knew him too well; he never had allowed cruelty among his men.

As soon as the fight was over, Ralph turned and asked: "Who commands this ship?"

"I did some few hours ago; that Englishman you killed did ten minutes since, and you do now, I suppose," bluntly said the American captain.

"You were captured by the English cruiser I see three leagues distant and coming hither, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then war has been declared between the United States and England?"

"Yes, the trouble has just begun."

Ralph was silent a moment, and stood gazing down upon the deck. Suddenly he raised his eyes, and before him stood a fair form that caused him to start and turn deadly pale.

"Jessie! Miss Reginald—you here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; and oh! Captain Ralph, under what terrible, what sad circumstances, do we meet again—you a buccaneer!" said Jessie, in tones of deepest feeling.

Ralph made no reply; his guilty conscience smote him hard, and he bowed his head in shame and sorrow, while Jessie continued:

"Am I, then, the captive of a pirate?"

"Oh, no, no, no—you are free; this vessel shall at once go on its way unmolested. I will no longer be an outcast, for there is a new field open to me now," suddenly cried Ralph, in earnest, low tones, heard only by the one to whom they were addressed.

Then, turning to the American seaman, he continued:

"Captain, your vessel is again under your command. Carry her into the nearest port, and please say that she was restored to you by Reckless Ralph, of the Fugitive Yacht—no longer a Buccaneer, but an American Privateer."

The surprised and delighted captain at once grasped Ralph's hand, and said earnestly:

"I am glad, young sir, to hear you say this, and if you serve the United States half as well as you have the Black Flag, you will take your neck out of the noose now around it."

"I will run my vessel for the nearest port; but I much fear yonder cruiser will overhaul me in my crippled condition; he has given up chasing the brigantine, and is crowding on all sail to look after his prize, for he sees your raking masts, and knows there is trouble."

"Let him come on; I will throw myself between you and danger. Put the English prize crew in irons, and get off at once. Hal see the brigantine! She is coming up astern of the cruiser and has opened fire. I will at once go to her aid, and you need fear no more trouble from your old enemy, captain."

Then turning to Jessie Reginald, whose beautiful face was bright with joy at the words of Ralph, he continued:

"Miss Reginald, had I not met you to-day I fear I would have always gone on in my evil course; but your sweet face again crossing my path, has made me another being. From this day I cast the bitterness and crime of the past behind me, and swear to live a better life."

"Remember me then no longer as the Buccaneer, but as a Privateersman, for I will cruise now only to aid my native land."

"When peace has come, and I have rubbed out the blot upon my name, we will meet again, for I will seek you out to prove to you that I have kept my word."

Jessie's eyes filled with tears of joy—and she held forth both her hands and clasped that of the youth, while she said:

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say this, and I know that you will keep your word. And when your name is free from dishonor, come and seek me; I will be at my house near New York city, living with my aunt, for my poor father is dead—he died at New Orleans, two months ago, and I am now returning home, having been with him on his last cruise."

"Come to me, Ralph, and come with honor, not dishonor. Farewell!"

The maiden turned away, and calling to his men to return to the yacht, Reckless Ralph waved his hand in adieu, and left the ship, which at once stood away to the northward, while the Fugitive Yacht headed directly toward the large English cruiser, her men at their guns, her young commander upon his quarter-deck—no longer a Buccaneer at heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN the Fugitive Yacht stood away in the direction of the English cruiser, that vessel was two leagues distant, and crowding on all sail to overhaul the clipper ship, whose capture by the schooner had been witnessed by the lookout at the mast-head of the Englishman, and which discovery at once terminated the chase after the brigantine.

As soon as the cruiser put about to rescue her prize, the brigantine at once followed her example and came swiftly on, firing with her bow-guns at her large foe.

This was the position of affairs when the yacht left the prize and headed so as to intercept the Englishman.

Seeing that he would thus be brought in between two fires, the English commander luffed and poured a broadside into the brigantine.

The fire was well-directed and brought down the topmast, while it also caused destruction upon the decks.

But undaunted by the damage done, the American commander returned the fire with effect, and finding that he had a plucky enemy to deal with, the ambitious Englishman determined to first make short work of the brigantine, and afterward overhaul the clipper.

Changing his course, the Englishman stood swiftly down toward the brigantine, who, unable to fly with her accustomed speed, after the loss of her topmasts, determined to fight it out bravely, ere surrendering to an enemy.

Nearer and nearer the two vessels drew, and the firing became fierce and rapid, and both vessels suffered in rigging, hull and crew; still the plucky American did not surrender, and the Englishman stood down to lay him aboard.

After a terrible broadside, the Englishman called out:

"Haul down your flag!"

"Come and haul it down yourself," was the answer from the brigantine, and the next moment the two vessels were side by side.

"Boarders repel boarders!" cried the American captain, and the crew of the brigantine met the shock resolutely upon their own deck.

But the crew of the cruiser outnumbered the men of the brigantine three to one, and drove the Americans back to their quarter-deck.

Here they made a desperate stand, and yet the American captain felt that it was of no avail—he had bravely fought his vessel and it was no disgrace to surrender to a foe so vastly his superior.

The words to surrender were upon his lips, when there was a sound in the air like many wings of birds in rapid flight, a shock, a wild yell from half a hundred throats, a clear, ringing voice, crying:

"Lads, follow me! Beat down these English dogs!"

The next instant the tide of battle was changed, for Reckless Ralph and three-score of his gallant crew had bounded upon the decks of the brigantine and hurled themselves upon the English crew with irresistible fury.

They were driven from the brigantine upon their own decks, followed closely and pressed with such determination that the Englishmen cried for quarter, and threw down their arms.

"Hold, lads! They cry for quarter, we have won the ship," cried Reckless Ralph, and the next instant a cry of surprised joy arose to his lips as his eyes fell upon the American captain. "Arthur Reginald! is it you?"

"Yes, Captain Ralph, and I owe you a service I can never repay. You have saved my beautiful brigantine and captured a fine cruiser. I owe all to you."

Ralph grasped warmly the extended hand and then said:

"And you had commanded the vessel that has so persistently dogged me the past year?"

"Yes, and I had a motive for it. I wished to capture you, and—allow you to escape. If others took you, you would be hung."

"You are a noble fellow, Captain Reginald; but I have news for you," and Ralph related how he had captured the prize, and found Jessie a passenger thereon; also of his determination to lead a new life, and wage war only against the enemies of the United States.

"You have begun nobly, my dear fellow, and it makes my heart glad to hear you say so; believe me, the Government shall know of your work to-day, and shall see the fine vessel you captured, besides knowing that you saved the clipper with its valuable cargo of munitions of war, and prevented the loss of the brigantine. They shall also know that the Fugitive Yacht is no longer a buccaneer, but a friend, fighting as bravely under the stars and stripes as it did under the pirate flag. Now, come; we will look over our captive."

Two hours after the Fugitive Yacht parted company with the brigantine and captured cruiser, and headed northward, while Captain Reginald, having put a prize crew on board the Englishman, steered for the nearest port for repairs, which both vessels badly needed.

Ere he parted with Ralph, Arthur Reginald told him how the court-martial had readily cleared him upon the testimony of the Senora Valdos and the beautiful Nita.

Also, Arthur told how he and Nita had

been married, and after a month of pleasure ashore, he had been promoted to the command of the brigantine and sent pirate-hunting.

Then the two friends parted, Ralph promising that the seas should no longer be haunted by the Fugitive Yacht as a buccaneer.

And Reckless Ralph sacredly kept his word, and hurling his black colors into the sea, he ran up the stars and stripes, and flew from sea to sea, inflicting terrible destruction upon English commerce, and winning a name for reckless daring and skillful seamanship, which made him a terror to English merchantmen, and an object of hatred to all cruisers flying the flag of Great Britain.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

ONE bright morning, a few weeks after the declaration of peace between the United States and Great Britain, and in the year 1815, Commodore Dorcas arose and looked from the window of his elegant house, out upon the broad Hudson, rolling majestically along only a hundred yards away.

"What do I see?" he exclaimed, excitedly—and shading his eyes with his hands he looked long and earnestly at some object that seemed to fascinate him.

"I'll be blest if that isn't my yacht—the Fugitive Yacht, at anchor on her old ground! What can it mean? I'll go down and see."

Hastily descending from his bedroom, he called his boatswain and made inquiries: but all he could learn was that the yacht was lying there when his boatswain arose in the morning.

"I'll go out to her," said the commodore, and ten minutes after he stood upon her deck.

Every rope was in perfect coil, the sails close-furled and new, the deck as white as snow, inside and out freshly painted, and the yacht furnished throughout with perfect taste and luxurious comfort.

Entering the cabin, the commodore saw upon the table a letter addressed to him. Instantly he seized upon it, broke the seal, and read:

"MY DEAR COMMODORE:—After a five-years' cruise, I return your yacht as good as new.

"To make up for little irregularities in taking her from her anchorage, five years ago, I return her to you with a great name, won first, I am sorry to say, under a buccaneer flag; but, during the late war, under the 'Stars and Stripes.'

"Thanking you for the use of your beautiful and weatherly craft, I remain, my dear Commodore Dorcas,

"Sincerely yours,

"RALPH ROY,

"Late commander of the Fugitive Yacht."

"Well, I'll swear, I never believed such things could happen; but it has, and seems like a romance. The boy has indeed wiped out the stain he first put upon my beautiful vessel—my Flying Phantom, and I am glad that the President has determined to pardon him and his Boy Buccaneers. I'll hunt the youth up, and yet take a sail with him as my captain." And in a delightful humor with himself and the world in general, the commodore, returned to the Mansion to breakfast.

As he entered the house, a form came out of an arbor on the river-bank, and wended his

way along a gravel path leading toward a gate that opened into an adjacent domain.

Entering the grounds the person walked toward a lordly mansion and ascended the stairway to the door, where a servant met him.

"Is Captain Reginald in?"

"No, sir; he is absent in Washington. His wife is here, and also Miss Jessie," replied the servant.

"Say, please, to Miss Reginald, that a friend would see her."

In a few moments Jessie entered the parlor.

Before her she beheld a tall, manly form, with a strangely-handsome face, in which was a look of sadness that had in it a fascination that was irresistible.

The complexion was darkly bronzed, the lips stern, and shaded by a long, dark mustache, and the whole bearing of the man that of one born to command.

"Miss Reginald, have you forgotten one in whose heart you have ever dwelt?"

The tone was deep, and full of pathos.

One glad cry and Jessie Reginald sprung forward and Ralph Roy drew her toward him with a joy he could not conceal.

"I have kept my word, Jessie."

"Nobly, Ralph, and my brother is expected with your pardon from the President."

"He is here, and here is your pardon."

Both started at the deep tones, and Arthur Reginald stood before them, an official document in his hand.

After warmly greeting the young man, Arthur said:

"The President gladly pardoned you, after I had told him all of your strange career, and he said you richly deserved the honor from his hands; but I see your yacht at anchor—"

"No, not mine any longer. I anchored her there last night, dismissed my noble crew, with pockets full of prize money, and left a note for Commodore Dorcas, thanking him for the use of his vessel, now no longer a fugitive yacht."

"Well, this must be your anchorage until you find a home," said Arthur earnestly.

"Thank you. I will accept your invitation for a few days and then run south to buy my boyhood's home. There I intend to live in the future, and there I hope to take Jessie one of these days."

"You have my consent, Ralph. I owe my life, my wife, my sister, all to you; but come, breakfast is on the table," and Arthur led the way into the dining-room, where Ralph met with another warm welcome from Mrs. Reginald, once the beautiful Nita Valdos.

With the prize money he had won—for Ralph distributed the wealth he had gained by piracy among the poor of New York—the plantation home of the Roys was repurchased, and refitted in handsome style.

Thither, a few months after, Ralph carried the lovely Jessie as his bride; but though the burying-ground in the beautiful garden was always a favorite retreat for the ex-sailor and his wife, Ralph Roy never made known to her that he had slain on that sacred spot Paul Presbury and Sandy Ross, when he was Chief of the Boy Buccaneers.

THE END.

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